

PLUCK AND LUCK

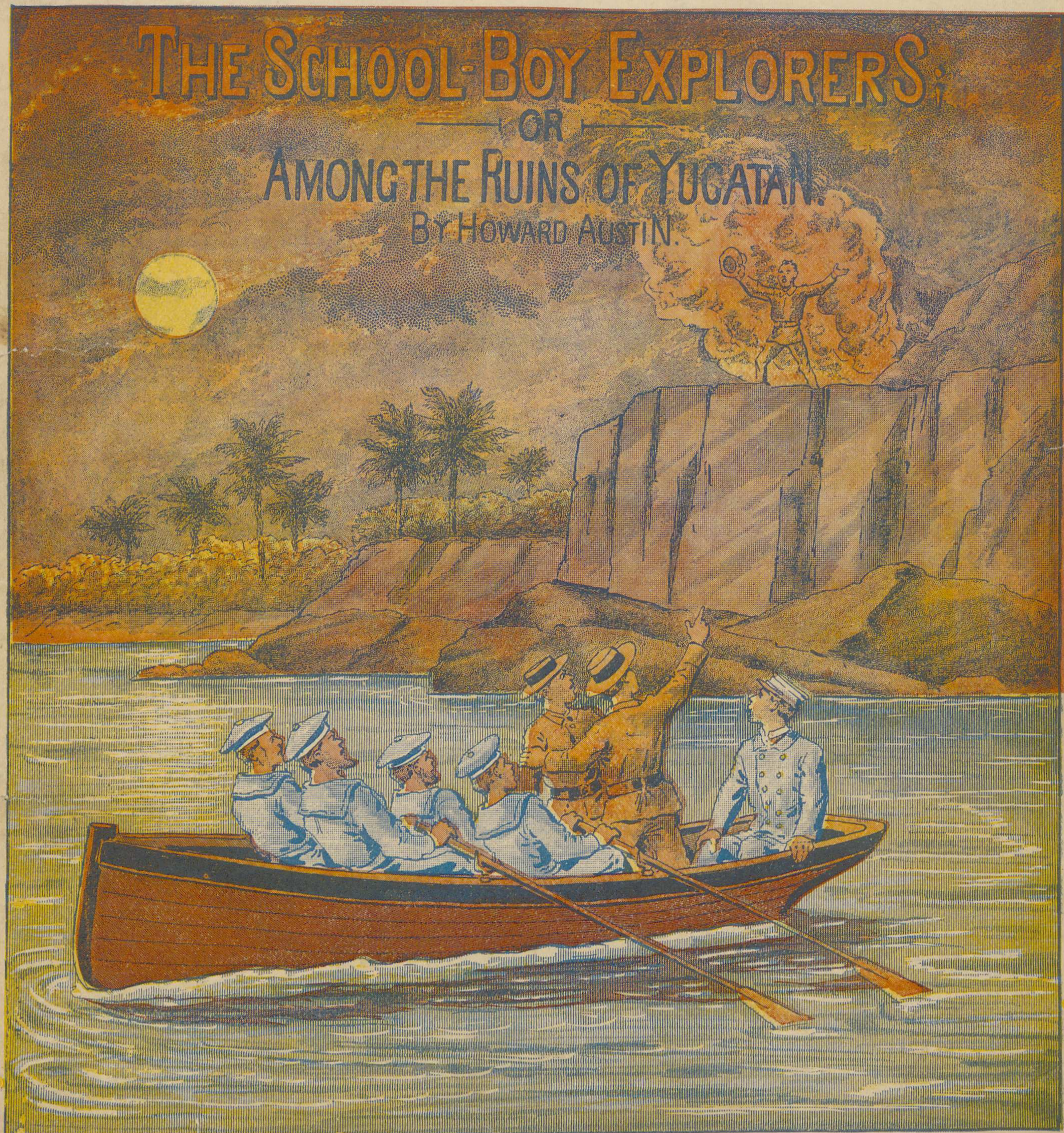
COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 26.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 30, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.



Rushing to the very edge of the steep descent, Harry waved his arms frantically, at the same time shouting aloud with all the strength of his lungs. The fire behind him revealed his figure with startling plainness to those in the boat.

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NEW YORK, November 30, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

The School-Boy Explorers;

— OR —

Among the Ruins of Yucatan.

BY HOWARD AUSTIN.

CHAPTER I.

COMMENCEMENT—A MIDNIGHT INTRUDER.

"THE lucky numbers, boys," said Professor Longmore, instructor in history at Dr. Tuckerman's Collegiate School in the City of New York, "are 33 and 99. There are 102 of you, according to the roll, though possibly one or two may be absent, so you have two chances in one hundred, or one chance in fifty, of taking this truly valuable prize."

Thereupon Professor Longmore, who had been addressing the boys at Dr. Tuckerman's school from a raised platform at one end of the main recitation room, proceeded to put several small slips of paper into a hat, each bearing a number, from 1 to 102.

Let not the reader think for an instant that there was in this arrangement anything partaking of the nature of a lottery.

Not at all.

Professor Longmore would have scorned the suggestion, Dr. Tuckerman never allowed it in the world. It was something of a totally different nature, which we will proceed to explain.

This was Commencement Day at Dr. Tuckerman's school.

June 22d was the day of the month if we remember rightly—the long vacation was about to begin.

After the graduating exercises were completed, the pieces spoken, the prizes awarded and the students about to separate, not to meet again until fall, Professor Longmore had suddenly announced that he had a private communication to address to his pupils, requesting them all to follow him for a few moments to the main recitation room before departing with their respective friends.

Now, Professor Longmore was popular—the most popular, we may say, of all the instructors in Dr. Tuckerman's school.

In the first place, he understood his business, and talked about nothing that he did not understand. In the second, he had by untiring energy managed to gather together a fine archæological museum, filled with ancient vases, arms, implements, pottery and hundreds of other curiosities, which had been of im-

mense assistance to the boys in their historical studies.

The announcement made by Professor Longmore was brief.

Nevertheless, it excited the students to the highest pitch.

It was to the effect that Senor Menendez, of Leon, Nicaragua, the father of one of their number, had written to say that he would pay the expenses of any two of his son's school companions who might like to accompany him to his Central American home during the coming vacation; adding that there existed on his estate the ruins of one of those ancient cities whose very names are mysteries, which are so frequently met with among the forests of Central America and Yucatan.

"I am willing," wrote Senor Menendez, "to permit the removal of any specimens found among the ruins which may be useful to Professor Longmore's museum. The work of exploration will be at once instructive and valuable to my son and his school-boy friends. The entire cost of shipping such specimens as may be found to New York, and, in fact, all the expenses of the trip, may be charged in my son's annual bill."

It was a most liberal offer, but then Senor Menendez, the rich coffee planter of Nicaragua, was known both as a wealthy and liberal man.

The only question to decide was as to who should take advantage of it.

Jose Menendez, with his tawny skin, dark eyes and coal-black hair, was one of the most popular boys in the school.

He was jovial and witty, considerate of everyone's feeling, and, as a consequence, everyone liked him, and strove to be considered his friend.

Now, Jose Menendez—or, "Joe," as he was usually called—knew this, and appreciated it.

When asked by Dr. Tuckerman who he would choose to accompany him to Central America, he positively refused to decide.

"Let them draw lots for it," was all he would say. "I want all to have an equal chance."

Of course, there were some among the students

whose parents would not permit them to take so long a trip, but that was a matter to be decided later on.

The business in hand now was to make the first selection, so Professor Longmore proceeded to shake the numbers well together in the hat.

"Form in line, boys, and take your chances!" he shouted. "Good luck to all of you. I only wish the same chance was offered to me."

The drawing began.

One—two—three—four boys thrust their hands into the hat, each in turn withdrawing a number and turning away disgusted.

The fifth—Oliver Elmore by name—a young Californian—called aloud:

"Thirty-three."

There was a loud clapping of hands.

"Good for you, Oliver! Wish you a pleasant trip, old fellow!" was the shout that went up from among the boys.

Everyone of them knew that Oliver Elmore would accept, for he was an orphan of large fortune and always did exactly as he pleased.

The drawing continued.

Boy after boy took his turn, until only two were left—Harry Hudson and Ed Jones—and still the number 99 remained in the hat.

It was Harry's turn first, and he drew it out, his fellow-student giving vent to an exclamation of disgust.

"Will you go, Harry?" asked the boys, pressing around him.

"Yes, indeed. My father is in Europe. I have no ties. I am only too glad of the chance."

"You are the very fellows I'd have picked out if I had been willing to choose," whispered Jose Menendez, as they left the school-room together. "I sail on the steamer Honduras for San Juan de Nicaragua day after to-morrow at noon. You'd better meet me to-morrow to make arrangements. All you need buy is your clothes, and let them be thin ones, for it is confoundedly hot down in Central America—I'll provide everything else needed for the trip."

It was a little singular that the numbers should have come out of the hat just as they did.

Harry, Joe and Oliver had always been chums since their first admittance to Dr. Tuckerman's school.

It is not often that fortune is so kind—at least, so Harry Hudson thought, as he walked down West 5—th street, on which the school was situated, in company with his friends.

The remainder of the day was spent in making preparations for the coming trip.

Night found Harry Hudson and Oliver Elmore seated in the room which they occupied in common, discussing the coming voyage.

The house in which the young students boarded was on Twenty-seventh street, between Lexington avenue and Third.

Their room was in the rear on the parlor floor, the windows opening just above a large grape arbor, upon which a vine was trained.

The house, though in the middle of the block, cornered on an alley which runs through from Twenty-seventh to Twenty-sixth street.

We direct especial attention to these particulars for reasons which we are about to disclose.

"Harry," said Oliver Elmore, as they were preparing for bed, "do you know that I shall look back upon this as one of the happiest days of my life? I have always desired above all things to visit Central America. When I was a little boy I used to read about the ruined cities buried down there in the forest, built by nobody knows who, and I used to long to be

able to explore them, but didn't suppose the chance would ever come."

"The same with me, Noll; but you see I'm so worried to-night that I can't take the pleasure out of the anticipation of our journey that I otherwise would."

"I noticed that you acted strangely ever since we came home this afternoon. What's the matter, old man?"

"Well, now you ask me, I don't know that anything is the matter. It may be only my imagination after all."

"But what is it? Give it right out. There ought to be no secrets between friends like you and me."

"Well, it's just this, Noll. When Longmore announced that you and I were to go to Central America, I thought I saw my cousin Dan Hudson among the people in the hall, but when I came to look for him he was gone."

"Well, what of that?"

"Nothing, perhaps, except that Dan is supposed to be in England with my father. They are working up a valuable patent together. If he has come to New York without calling on me, I think it mighty strange."

"I don't believe you saw him at all. You only imagined you did."

"So I began to think myself, until I came home this afternoon. Then I learned something from Mrs. Honeywell, our boarding-house keeper, that puzzled me more than I was before."

"What was that?"

"Why, she told me that the morning mail brought me a letter with the London postmark. The letter was put on the table here, and about an hour after a man called to see me. The girl showed him right up to the room, thinking I was in. Who he was or when he went out they don't seem to know, but anyway my letter can't be found."

"It is very strange, certainly, but I wouldn't let it worry me. Do you suppose the letter was from your father?"

"I'm afraid so. I have an idea that something may have happened to him."

"In that case you would have been cabled."

"Well, I suppose so, but I'm tired of thinking about it. Let's go to bed. Maybe to-morrow the letter will turn up."

At the age of Harry Hudson and his chum, Oliver Elmore, wakefulness is not a common thing.

In less than ten minutes the boys were in bed.

The mystery of the letter was forgotten, and they were soon fast asleep.

It was between the hours of one and two that Harry Hudson next awoke.

He was dreaming of his coming journey, when he suddenly found himself sitting bolt upright in bed, with a consciousness that someone was moving about the room.

Except for the faint grayness, that found its way through the open window, the room was totally dark.

Faint though it was, it was still sufficiently light for Harry to perceive the figure of a man filling the open space, in the very act of climbing from the grape arbor into the room.

"A burglar!" was the boy's instant reflection.

Then, leaping from the bed, he seized a chair—the first defensive weapon he could think of—and with a loud cry to his sleeping companion, sprang across the room.

The man, who had already put one leg through the window, instantly leaped backward.

By the time Harry had gained the opening he had

jumped from the grape arbor and down into the alley below.

Thrusting his head from the window, Harry Hudson peered out into the night.

As he did so a sudden cry of astonishment escaped him.

It was not at the sight of the supposed burglar, whose face he was unable to see, but at the glimpse, caught for one instant by the light of a gas lamp which burned in the alley, of another and stouter man, who now dashed after him at the top of his speed.

It was the face of his father's partner and his own cousin, Dan Hudson, of which he had obtained a momentary glimpse at the commencement exercises of Dr. Tuckerman's school the afternoon before.

CHAPTER II.

OVERBOARD IN THE CARIBBEAN SEA.

"MAN overboard! Man overboard!"

Such was the cry which startled the passengers of the steamer Honduras, as at eleven o'clock on a beautiful, starlight evening she plowed slowly along close to the easterly coast of the Peninsula of Yucatan, through the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea.

The cry proceeded from the helmsman.

It was taken up by the boatswain, who chanced to be crossing the deck, and passed to the mate upon the bridge.

There were but few passengers still remaining upon the deck of the Honduras, owing to the lateness of the hour, but among these few the most intense excitement ensued.

They crowded to the stern, peering out upon the starlit water, talking, gesticulating—each giving his opinion as to what was the proper course to pursue.

Who was the man?

From what part of the steamer had he fallen?

From over the stern rail on the lower deck apparently—certainly it had not been from the promenade deck above.

As Captain Craig came hurriedly to the stern to ascertain the full nature of the accident, two young men, pale and trembling, dashed up the companion ladder and confronted him.

"Captain, captain!" cried the foremost, a dark-skinned young Spanish-American, "for Heaven's sake, save him if you can!"

"Senor Menendez," answered the captain, calmly, "I shall do my best."

Instantly the order was given to stop the engines and to lower the boats.

"Who is it?" demanded Captain Craig, turning to Jose Menendez and Oliver Elmore, two of our young explorers from Dr. Tuckerman's school.

"It is Mr. Hudson," drawled a disagreeable voice from behind them, and before either of the boys had opportunity to reply, a man thrust himself between the captain and themselves.

He was a tall, lank, disagreeable looking individual, with iron gray hair and pimply face.

He was the one individual above all to whom the young explorers, since they began their voyage to Nicaragua, had taken an especial antipathy, for the reason that he persisted in intruding his presence upon them at all times and all seasons, whether they liked it or not.

The name of this individual was Tisbert Tod.

Who he was or the nature of his business in Nicaragua no one on board the Honduras had been able to discover from the beginning of the voyage down to the present time.

On the day appointed Jose Menendez and his friends had taken passage on the Honduras, all going well with them until now.

Regarding the mystery of the midnight intruder into his bedroom, the supposed presence of his cousin in New York and the disappearance of his London letter, Harry Hudson had been able up to the moment of sailing to discover nothing.

After mature deliberation, however, he resolved not to allow this to interfere with his intended trip.

Accordingly he wrote to his father, stating his intentions, and sailed on the day appointed with his friends.

The captain of the Honduras who had imbibed the common dislike for Mr. Tisbert Tod, somewhat unceremoniously thrust him to one side.

"Is he right?" he demanded, glancing off upon the water, where a dark form could be seen bobbing up and down. "Is it really Mr. Hudson, boys?"

"We are afraid so," was the excited reply. "We can't find Harry anywhere. He started to go to the stern on the lower deck, and——"

"And I, who happened to be looking in that direction, saw him fall over the rail," interposed the irrepressible Mr. Tod again. "He must have been seasick, he leaned over too far—it was myself who raised the cry."

All was now confusion on board the Honduras.

Within an incredibly short space of time the engines had stopped, and a boat had been made ready for lowering to go to the rescue of the passenger seen struggling with the waves.

"May we go in the boat, captain?" demanded Oliver, anxiously.

The captain shook his head.

"I think you had better remain on board, boys. Sailors understand this business better than you, and——"

"But it is our friend whose life is at stake."

"Your friend can swim, I suppose. At the point where he fell overboard it is not more than a quarter of a mile distant to the shore."

"Harry Hudson is a splendid swimmer. You've got your night glass, captain—tell us, can you see him now?"

Captain Craig leveled his glass over the expanse of water lying between them and the dark, low outline of the Yucatan shore.

The head, which a moment before all could plainly perceive raised above the gently rippling surface of the water, had now disappeared from view.

The entreaties of the young companions of Harry Hudson to be allowed to enter the boat softened the heart of Captain Craig at last.

"Go, then, boys, and good luck attend you," he said. "I can't tell you how much I regret this sad occurrence. But be of good courage; if your friend is any sort of a swimmer he will certainly have reached the shore by the time you can overtake him. It is not over a quarter of a mile at the most."

"Unless the sharks have already made mince meat of him," interposed Mr. Tisbert Tod, in his usual drawling tone. "They are regular man-eaters in these parts—at least so I'm told."

"Nobody asked your interference, Mr. Tod," snapped Captain Craig, savagely. "If you'd been a leetle more sprier in reporting what you saw, we might have had the boy on the deck by this time. Into the boat there! Lower the davit ropes! Lower away!"

In another moment the boat from the Honduras shot away across the blue waters, the passengers crowding to the port rail, straining their eyes after her as she rapidly disappeared from view.

"I hope they save him! Oh, I hope they save him!" ejaculated Mr. Tisbert Tod. "The unmerited rebuke bestowed upon me by Captain Craig for my want of promptness has wounded my feelings deeply, as I am extremely sensitive—it has indeed."

Now, this somewhat high-flown speech, though in itself well enough, seemed to grate upon the ears of such of the passengers near enough to hear it.

Somehow, each and all appeared to distrust the man's sincerity.

Why, it would have difficult for anyone to tell.

Just how the accident occurred no one—not even Jose Menendez and Oliver Elmore—had seemed to know.

That is always excepting Mr. Tisbert Tod.

They only had his statement for it that the man overboard was Harry Hudson at all.

Still, if such were not the case, the young student would have undoubtedly made his presence known long before this.

There could be but little question that it was he.

Meanwhile the boat had passed into the dark shadows which hung low upon the water and out of sight.

Still Captain Craig and the passengers of the Honduras maintained their watch.

Suddenly—it was after the lapse of half an hour or so—a bright light was seen to shoot up upon the distant shore.

It flashed for some five or ten minutes, slowly decreasing in intensity until it had altogether disappeared.

What did this portend?

Had Harry Hudson succeeded in reaching the shore and lighted this fire as a signal?

It was the first idea which suggested itself.

Then came the recollection that in all probability the means of lighting a fire must be wanting.

If the unfortunate student carried matches about him, there was but a slight possibility that he would find them in condition to use after his long swim.

Another half hour elapsed, and another.

Then a hail from the boat was heard.

Five minutes later and the rescuing party trod the deck.

As Captain Craig ran his eye hastily over their number an exclamation escaped him.

"Where are those two young men?" he thundered.

"Do you mean to tell me you've lost them as well as failing to save the one you went after?"

The officer in charge of the boat in great disturbance, proceeded to explain.

They had entirely failed to find Harry Hudson.

Reaching the shore, they had landed and searched up and down the beach everywhere, but in vain.

Then, reluctantly concluding that he had met his fate, they had started on their return.

When a few hundred yards from the shore the bright light seen from the steamer had suddenly shot up behind them.

Though it lit up the shore for a considerable distance, no sign of any person could be seen.

The two students now demanded that the boat put back, insisting upon it that no one but their missing friend could have fired the beacon.

This the officer, according to his statement, feeling that they had remained away from the steamer long enough, refused to do.

Now, the remainder of the officer's story was slightly misty.

Just how it had happened he seemed unable to state.

Certain it was, however, that Jose Menendez and

Oliver Elmore, unwilling to desert their friend, had jumped from the boat and swam toward the beacon.

Though the officer asserted stoutly that he had pulled after them, he had been unable to find any trace of the boys, and the boat had at length returned, abandoning them to their fate.

The excitement on board the Honduras was now tremendous.

The captain immediately ordered the officer who had gone out in charge of the boat to be immediately put in irons, and a second boat, commanded by himself, pushed off from the steamer in search of the missing boys.

Long after midnight it returned, only to report a complete want of success.

Meanwhile, signs of an approaching storm had been gathering, and Captain Craig felt that it would be endangering the lives of all on board to longer remain in such close proximity to a dangerous coast.

With deep reluctance he accordingly gave orders for the Honduras to proceed on her voyage.

The wind had now increased to a gale, blowing directly on shore with great violence.

Most of the passengers had by this time retired.

On the lower deck, at the extreme aft, sitting upon the stern rail from which Harry Hudson had fallen, might have been found Mr. Tisbert Tod, alone, straining his eyes in the endeavor to catch a glimpse of the shore toward which they had been steadily drifting, now less than an eighth of a mile away.

"How easily it was done!" he muttered to himself.

"One little push—'twas all it needed. In two days we'll be at San Juan de Nicaragua—in two weeks' time I'll be back in New York to claim my reward."

Now, as Mr. Tisbert Tod gave utterance to these singular remarks he leaned slightly forward to emphasize the push he described.

At that moment the engines of the Honduras were put in motion, causing Mr. Tod to topple forward.

Surely, this was speedy retribution.

The man had tasted his own medicine.

His neels went up, his head went down.

In another instant Mr. Tisbert Tod was floundering amid the waves.

CHAPTER III.

A RUINED TEMPLE.

EXAMINE the map of Mexico, reader, and you will find that the lower half of the eastern shore of the peninsula of Yucatan, known as the province of Campeachy, is an absolute blank.

It bears the name of neither town nor city, and this for an excellent reason.

This part of the country embraces one vast primeval forest—it is as wholly unexplored as the interior of Africa itself.

It was upon this inhospitable shore that we now find our two young friends, Oliver Elmore and Jose Menendez, standing in the full glare of a tropical sunlight, straining their eyes out upon the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea.

It was morning—night and a most terrific storm had passed, and the abandoned explorers were striving to catch a glimpse of the steamer Honduras, now, if they had but known it, more than sixty miles away.

There is no mystery connected with their presence here.

In the inhumanity of a pig-headed seaman lay the whole cause.

The officer in command of the boat sent out to seek for Harry Hudson had lied—simply lied—when he

claimed to have landed and to have searched the shore.

What he did was to come as close as he could to it without going to the trouble to take the boat through the surf, which was somewhat high.

Against this the two students had vigorously protested.

The answer of the officer was that if they didn't "hold their jaw" he would knock them over the head with an oar.

At that moment the beacon was fired.

By its light the students beheld Harry Hudson standing upon a rock, making signs for them to approach.

Now, this exciting vision remained but for an instant.

Before either the rowers or the officer in charge of the boat had time to see it the young student was gone.

With the most intense eagerness Oliver and Jose told him of what they had seen, and besought him to pull ashore.

The officer refused peremptorily.

He declined to credit their statement, and ordered an immediate return to the steamer.

It was then that Jose Menendez leaped from the boat and swam for the shore.

"I'll not desert my friend!" he shouted, with all the boldness of his Spanish race. "Follow me or not, Oliver Elmore, I shall share Harry Hudson's fate."

And Oliver did follow.

He was over the side of the boat and after the brave young Nicaraguan in an instant.

The shore was not a hundred yards away, and both struck off boldly for the rock upon which the fire still burned.

Now what became of the boat was something the young explorers never knew.

Whether or no any attempt to reach the shore was made is extremely doubtful.

It is but just to say that neither of the students had believed that the officer would desert them.

That they were mistaken the reader is already aware.

Gaining the shore without difficulty, Jose—or Joe, as we shall henceforth call him—scrambled up on the shelving beach.

He was followed by Oliver Elmore a moment later on.

It is needless to say that they found no trace of Harry Hudson.

Otherwise, now that morning has dawned upon the shores of the Yucatan Peninsula, we would not find them alone.

The fire was there—what was left of it—a mass of embers smoldering upon the rock, but Harry was nowhere to be seen.

Shouts for the boat proved of no avail.

It did not return.

The storm came and passed.

During its progress the boys sought shelter beneath the rocks which overhung the shore at a point considerably distant from their first landing since the failure of Captain Craig to find them.

Morning found them alive and well—deserted on an unfriendly shore.

"It's a bad fix, a mighty bad fix," remarked Oliver, as the fact that the steamer had actually departed became settled on their minds. "Anyhow, it's morning, and the sun shines again. If we don't starve to death meanwhile, we may be able to push up the coast and reach some settlement at last."

"No danger of starving," replied Joe. "There's enough to eat always to be found in these southern

forests. Don't forget that this country and mine are much the same. These trees are all strange to you, Noll, but I know the name of every one that grows."

"How far do you think it is to the nearest settlement, Joe?"

"Well, as I remember the map, Valladolid is the nearest. But that is in the interior a hundred miles away, if I rightly understand where we are."

"Nothing nearer?"

"Nothing whatever. I've heard much about this country. It is one vast forest through which no white man has ever been. It is filled with wild beasts and Indians who have never been tamed."

Oliver shuddered.

"That fully accounts for poor Harry's sudden disappearance," he said. "No doubt some animal sprang upon him. Upon my word, Joe, it makes me sick to think of the rest."

The young Nicaraguan shuddered.

Better—far better—than his comrade he understood the probability of this being no theory, but the dreadful truth.

"Come—come!" he exclaimed. "There's no use in being down-hearted. Do you see that hill rising over there among the trees? Suppose we push through the woods and climb it? It will give us an idea of the country into which we have so unexpectedly fallen, if nothing else."

The proposition was agreed upon.

But half an hour's tramp through the tangle of a tropical forest had seemingly brought them no nearer the hill than they were at the start.

Suddenly Oliver, who was slightly in advance, gave utterance to a cry of astonishment.

"Look here, Joe, we have struck a settlement! Don't you see that great white building rising up among the trees?"

The Nicaraguan looked in the direction indicated.

"It's a building, sure enough," he replied, doubtfully, "but it's my opinion we shall find it to be one of the ruined temples, of which there are hundreds hidden in the forests of Yucatan. Let us push ahead and see."

It was easier said than done.

The nearer they approached to the building—which stood on the top of a considerable eminence—the more densely tangled the forest became.

They came out upon it unexpectedly at last.

Oliver, still in advance, emerging from a thick clump of sapota trees—as his comrade called them—found himself in an open space not ten feet distant from a broad flight of stone steps.

At the top of these steps stood a low building, square in form and constructed of a whitish stone.

It was flanked on either side by other buildings which seemed simply a mass of ruins, all overgrown with bushes and even large trees.

This also was true of the building at the summit of the elevation, and even of the steps themselves.

"A ruined temple, just as I supposed!" exclaimed Joe. "My, but this beats those of Nicaragua all hollow. See that great tree, Noll, growing directly on top of that small building off to the right. There's quite a respectable grove, too, starting up on the roof of the temple itself."

"Shall we go up the steps and explore it?" proposed Oliver. "Exploring is what brought us into this fix, Joe. Now that we have a ruin before us, we might as well begin."

"I'm with you!" cried Joe, springing lightly up the steps.

Oliver followed.

At the same instant from one of the doors of the ruined temple there emerged a man.

He was tall, as straight as an arrow; in color a reddish brown.

Over his naked shoulders was flung gracefully a tiger skin which hung down below his waist.

A crown of eagle's feathers rested above his forehead; he held in his left hand a spear to which hung the skin of some small animal, while with his right he made a stern, commanding gesture, motioning the young explorers down the steps.

CHAPTER IV.

DAN HUDSON'S DOINGS.

It was Dan Hudson whom Harry had seen that night in the alley.

It was also Mr. Tisbert Tod.

Notwithstanding the fact of our having left the latter individual in an extremely ticklish position, floundering about in the blue waters of the Caribbean in the middle of the night, and a storm coming on, we must trust to Providence to look out for his future welfare and, for the time being at least, return to the midnight intruder into Harry Hudson's room, and take a glance at his past.

No sooner had the two men seen by Harry to run through the alley gained Twenty-sixth street—its end—than they leaped into a waiting cab.

The driver seemingly comprehending the situation, lashed his horses into a run, and the cab whipping around the corner into Third avenue, rattled at a tremendous pace off up-town.

During the ride neither Dan Hudson—a stout, puffy man of some thirty years, in personal appearance an exaggerated repetition of our hero—nor his companion seemed inclined to talk.

In fact, it was not until they found themselves alone in a room at one of New York's most fashionable hotels that any allusion whatever was made to the adventure in the alley.

It was evident from the first word uttered that Dan Hudson was far from pleased with its result.

"Confound it, Tod!" he exclaimed, flinging himself into a chair, "you made a pretty mess of the business, didn't you? Thought you were going to slip in, chloroform the boys, and drop the pillow over my cub of a cousin, so that when he was found dead in the morning, nothing but accident could be charged? Oh, it was a fine plan—a fine plan, only it didn't work for a cent."

Tisbert Tod—who was the same absurd-looking individual as we last saw him on board the steamer Honduras, with the exception that he now wore a suit of extremely shabby clothes of rusty black—sat down upon the extreme edge of one of the chairs and pushing back his forelock, which had a fashion of tumbling down over his forehead upon all occasions, heaved a deep sigh.

"I regret exceedingly my inability to carry out my engagement with you in its entirety, Mr. Hudson," he replied in his usual stilted style and slow, measured tones; "but you must grant, my dear sir, that it was not wholly my fault—I repeat, not wholly my fault."

"There's no need of your repeating it! If it wasn't your fault I'd like to know whose it was? You clumsy idiot! you made so much noise getting through the window that you waked the boys up!"

"I deny the allegation, Mr. Hudson! I deny the allegation, sir. Do you suppose that with a prospective emolument of several thousands of the dollars of my country in my mind's eye in the event of the successful fulfillment of the little scheme arranged between us, I could be so culpably negligent as to make a noise?"

"Confound you, Tod, you are a pedantic old ass!" roared the other. "Look here, time's short. Drop your dictionary talk and come down to business. Harry Hudson sails for Central America to-morrow. There will be no time to repeat our experiment. What are we going to do?"

"Mr. Hudson?"

"Well?"

"Have you ever heard the somewhat aged maxim: 'The more haste the less speed?'"

"Of course I have, you fool."

"Pardon me, I am not a fool. Neither am I an idiot, as twice already you have had the goodness to suggest. I may be slow of speech, but I claim to be possessed of average intelligence. Before committing myself I desire time for reflection. Do not interrupt me—I am about to reflect."

And Mr. Tisbert Tod again pushing back his forelock with his right hand, leaned his head on his left, his face assuming a gravity of expression ridiculously absurd.

For a few moments silence reigned within the room.

"Come!" exclaimed Dan Hudson, at length, "have you reflected? By all that's good, Tod, you are the same absurd person you were when we were boys together at school. I can't fool round this matter any longer. There are millions involved for me in the question of Harry Hudson's life. Either you must suggest some scheme to make way with him, or I shall have to get someone else."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I say you won't."

"What difference does it make to me what you say?"

"Just this difference, Dan Hudson. I am starving. When you picked me up in the street yesterday, I hadn't had a square meal or a bed outside of a Bowery lodging-house in a month. I have undertaken this job, and I intend to finish it, for I want the money. Attempt to take it away from me, and I shall be under the painful necessity of reporting the whole affair to the police."

Dan Hudson turned as white as a sheet.

It was perfectly evident that the man was a coward at heart.

"Look here, Tod," he said, more mildly, "I have no wish to deprive you of the promised reward. On the contrary, I will double it. I'll give you \$10,000 on the day you place in my hands positive proof of Harry Hudson's death."

"It's a bargain. Now that I have reflected, I am prepared to unfold my scheme."

"Well, what is it?"

"The first thing to-morrow morning you must give me five hundred dollars and two full suits of clothes."

"Consider that settled."

"Next you must purchase for me a ticket on the Nicaragua steamer in which Harry Hudson and his friends are about to sail."

"I'll do it. What next?"

"Why, next I shall sail with that steamer; when she returns I shall return with her. It will be my business to bring back with me the proofs which you seek."

"Then you propose——"

"Pardon me. I propose nothing. I shall be guided by circumstances. It is a long sail from here to San Juan de Nicaragua. If Harry Hudson should happen to fall overboard in mid-ocean it would certainly be a lamentable occurrence, but you must never think of blaming me."

"And I won't, Tod," exclaimed Hudson, bringing down his fist upon the table. "Your plan is a good

one. You stick by me and I'll stick by you. Only do what you promise, and you will look back upon your meeting with me on Broadway this morning as the luckiest moment of your life."

Thus it happened that Mr. Tisbert Tod came to be a fellow passenger on the Honduras with Harry Hudson and his school-boy friends.

During the days which followed Dan Hudson continued to board at the fashionable hotel.

He appeared to have but little business on hand, and kept out of the way of all his former friends.

As the time approached when the return of the Honduras might be reasonably expected, Dan Hudson eagerly watched the ship news from day to day.

It came at last.

Early one morning in the beginning of the following August Dan Hudson hurried to the pier of the Nicaragua line, and boarding the Honduras, inquired for Captain Craig.

"I want to inquire about a young relative of mine who sailed with you on your last outward trip," was his first remark. "I came over from England on purpose to see him, but unfortunately arrived a day too late; he had just sailed with you."

"What name?" inquired the captain. "I shall be happy to furnish any information I can."

"Hudson—Harry Hudson."

Captain Craig's brow grew dark.

"Harry Hudson! Are you a relative of Harry Hudson?" he asked, with a troubled air.

"Yes—a cousin."

"Well, sir, I—I hardly know how to tell you, but your cousin accidentally fell overboard and was drowned on an outward voyage."

Certainly no actor could have better simulated sorrow than did Dan Hudson as the captain's tale was told.

As he was about to leave the cabin of the Honduras, in which the conversation took place, he turned suddenly, addressing the captain again.

"By the way, captain, there was another friend of mine on board your steamer—Mr. Tisbert Tod—did you leave him well?"

"Tisbert Tod? Mr. Hudson, you are unfortunate! The accident which I have just related was not the only one which occurred on that fatal night. It pains me exceedingly to tell you that we never saw Mr. Tod from that time out. It is believed that in some unaccountable manner he fell overboard, too."

"Now, this is simply immense!" muttered Dan Hudson, as a moment later he hurried off the pier.

"Tod gone, too! How exceedingly fortunate! Not only have I saved \$10,000, but there remains no living witness to appear against me in case of an inquiry later on."

The next day Dan Hudson sailed for Liverpool in one of the swiftest steamers of the White Star line.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE ROCK.

It was an eventful night for Harry Hudson.

We refer to the night of the accident on the Nicaragua steamer, of course.

Harry had been sitting on the rail of the Honduras in the extreme aft on the lower deck, quietly enjoying the beauty of the tropical night.

When the shock came he was wholly unprepared for it.

He had not heard Mr. Tisbert Tod creeping toward him from behind; nor, as he found himself suddenly

pushed headlong into the ocean, did he even catch a glimpse of his malevolent face.

Someone had pushed him.

It was all he knew.

When he rose to the surface, uttering a cry for help, the steamer was already at a considerable distance away.

Harry Hudson was an excellent swimmer.

If we remember aright that fact has been mentioned before.

It was a question between the steamer and the land.

Distances, owing to the purity of the atmosphere, are deceptive in tropical countries, and as he looked about him both seemed equally near.

Treading water and raising himself as best he could, Harry turned his gaze toward the steamer.

She was still forging away from him.

He could discover no signs of commotion upon her deck.

Apparently his cry had not been heard.

Now, there is no use in denying that our hero was frightened.

He realized fully the peril of his position; nevertheless, he did not lose his head.

The steamer was constantly receding—the shore on the other hand remained stationary, and what was more, a rising tide was steadily carrying him in.

In an instant the decision of the boy was taken.

Swimming and floating alternately, now striking out boldly, now resting quietly on his back and suffering himself to drift with the tide, he slowly drew near the shore.

Such was the occupation of Harry Hudson during the moments which followed.

Nearer and nearer the dark, wooded outline of the shore seemed to approach him.

There were no breakers; it was steep and rocky.

At last, at the moment when strength seemed about to fail, a friendly wave of greater force than any which had preceded it caught him in its embrace and threw his body high up on the sands of a little cove.

It was the last that Harry knew for some moments to come.

The mental strain relaxed, all grew dark around him, and, as the wave retreated, he swooned away.

Unconsciousness at Harry Hudson's age is not apt to be of long duration.

Not if the subject is mentally and physically sound.

In less than five minutes the boy was on his feet again, scrambling up the rocks which abutted the cove.

"For Heaven's sake, what am I to do?" he murmured, as he surveyed the dark unbroken line of forest on one side of him, the sea on the other. "What a terrible thing! To be abandoned here on this desolate coast! Someone pushed me! I'm sure of it, but there is no time to be lost in speculation. Before it is too late I must try and signal the steamer."

He could easily see the Honduras in the moonlight; she seemed to have stopped. The main question now was how to make those on board see him.

It was a question soon settled.

There were sticks in abundance scattered all along the edge of the forest, and, to his great joy, Harry found upon examination that the matches which he carried in a water-tight box, with which he had been prudent enough to provide himself before leaving New York, still remained unharmed.

The result was the fire seen by Oliver Elmore and Jose Menendez in the boat as well as by those who watched eagerly from the steamer's deck.

Now, the boat had approached the shore at a point

considerably below the cove in which Harry Hudson had landed.

He had seen it and had called to its occupants, but in vain.

Uncertain of his ability to find the way in the darkness, he had wisely decided to remain where he was and light the fire as a signal as soon as he could.

This took time.

Much of the wood proved to be thoroughly saturated by the heavy tropical dew, and as a consequence, entirely too wet to burn.

By the time the boy was able to get the fire started at last, the boat, without landing, had already turned back toward the steamer again.

It was an anxious moment.

Surely they could not intend to go off, not even effecting a landing, which could be had without difficulty anywhere along the shore?

It seemed incredible.

Nevertheless, as Harry stood upon the rock in the full light of the blaze which he had created, he could see the boat steadily moving away in the direction of the steamer again.

Then came the crisis.

Rushing to the very edge of the steep descent, Harry waved his arms frantically, at the same time shouting aloud with all the strength of his lungs.

The fire behind him revealed his figure with startling plainness to those in the boat, as we know.

It is true that his shouts were not sufficiently loud to traverse the space intervening between them, but, nevertheless, they were heard.

Heard by whom?

Had Harry Hudson but cast one glance behind him, he would have witnessed a somewhat startling sight.

It was a man, dark and swarthy, naked save for a clout of cotton cloth about his loins, the skin of a puma, or South American lion, thrown about his shoulders, and an elaborately constructed crown of many colored feathers worn on the head.

He was armed with a sort of hook-shaped knife—known as a machete in Yucatan—and was creeping along noiselessly over the rock upon all fours, with head slightly raised, regarding the boy with burning eyes.

“Help! help! help!” shouted Harry, waving his hands more wildly even than before.

There seemed to be some altercation going on in the boat.

Two of its occupants were standing up, with their faces turned toward the fire.

It was all that Harry Hudson saw.

At the same instant the man behind him rose to his feet, and, seizing him from behind, with a sudden spring bore him down upon the surface of the rock.

Had the earth opened and swallowed him, the boy could not have been taken more completely by surprise.

The Indian—for such was his assailant—had him by the throat, and having pulled him backward upon the rock, now planted his knee in the pit of Harry’s stomach, and with a cord of loosely-twisted hemp proceeded to tie his hands.

During the operation Harry found it entirely impossible to utter a sound, for, as the tying was skillfully performed by the left hand of the Indian, he still maintained the grip on his throat with the right.

Having drawn the knot tightly together by aid of his teeth, the Indian let go his hold, arose, and shot one glance behind him in the direction of the boat.

It was perfectly evident what he was about.

He had seen the boat and was anxious to determine its position then.

It was Harry’s last chance, and he availed himself of it.

With all the strength he possessed he raised his voice in one despairing cry for help.

Instantly the Indian turned upon him, and bending over, brandished his machete in his face, at the same time uttering some words rapidly in an unknown tongue.

It was quite enough for Harry.

Nor is it necessary to say he made no effort to cry out again.

Seizing him by the coat collar the Indian lifted him to his feet as though he had been a child.

“*Adelante muchacho!*” (go forward, boy,) he grunted, at the same time pushing Harry before him into the forest.

In another instant they had left the shore behind them and entered a tangled jungle such as Harry had never seen before.

Now, during the trip Harry Hudson had been studying Spanish. Indeed, he had possessed some slight knowledge of that tongue before.

The words of the Indian, spoken in the language of the country, encouraged him to hope that after all his position might not be so bad.

If the fellow spoke Spanish he must be in some degree civilized.

Summoning up courage, Harry ventured to inquire, in the best Spanish he could muster, where he was taking him.

The only reply was a sharp kick from behind, discouraging all further attempts at conversation.

There seemed to be a narrow footpath running through this part of the forest.

Of course Harry could have never followed it in the darkness which surrounded them, had it not been for the guiding hand of his companion, who was constantly pushing him this way and that.

And as they advanced from out of the dark thickets on either side, the cries of wild animals could be distinctly heard, and every now and then the crackling of boughs ahead of them showed that these midnight marauders were by no means so far away.

These sounds had no apparent effect on the Indian.

Once there came a sharp cry from the path directly in front of them, a cry resembling that of a child in distress, which brought Harry to a sudden halt. But he was quick to start on again, when his companion, leaning forward, seized him by the throat with a violent push, at the same time pressing the cold blade of the machete close against his face.

At last Harry found himself suddenly emerging from the thicket into an open space.

Before him stood a large, whitish building, plainly visible in the moonlight, not more than fifty feet away.

The building was long and low, though from the fact that it stood upon the summit of a slight elevation it presented an imposing appearance.

It was flanked by two towers, beyond which were smaller structures on a level with the base of the little hill.

A broad flight of steps, upon which several tall trees had taken root, their tops towering higher than the building itself, led up to a row of low, open doors, through which a bright light could be seen burning within.

It was one of the ruined temples so common in the forests of Yucatan.

Even in the moonlight its dilapidated condition was apparent; in fact, grass and small trees could be seen growing on the very roof.

No longer trusting his captive to advance quietly

before him, the Indian now grasped Harry's arm with a vise-like grip and hurried him up the flight of steps.

His whole manner had seemed to change since emerging into the opening. He appeared to be laboring under some great excitement. Before he had been content to walk, now he broke into a run.

Entering through one of the low doorways, he gave utterance to a loud shout, as dragging Harry after him, he dashed through a narrow passage and emerged into a large apartment beyond.

There are sights and scenes which once beheld remain indelibly impressed upon the memory until one's dying day.

Such was the scene which now burst upon Harry Hudson. It was one which he was not likely to forget.

Within the apartment into which he had been hurried were at the least calculation fifty Indians similar in appearance to the one who had attacked him on the rock.

Naked, save at the waist and for the pumaskins and feather head-dresses, they stood in a semi-circle about a hideous idol, before which was a large stone altar in the center of the hall, chanting in low, monotonous tones.

Behind the altar stood five naked boys, holding aloft burning torches of some resinous wood, while before it knelt a man whose feather head-dress was even more extensive than the rest, with his face bowed as though in prayer.

But the most startling sight of all was yet to come.

Harry saw it as he was dragged within the semi-circle by his captor, upon whom the solemnity of the occasion seemed to have no effect.

It was a naked youth, bound hand and foot with cords, who lay upon the top of the altar stretched out on his back.

What did it mean?

There could be but one explanation.

It meant human sacrifice, known to have been practiced by the unconverted Indians of Yucatan from the most ancient times.

No sooner had the chanters perceived the entrance of our hero and his companion than, with a wild shout, they sprang toward them, and seizing Harry, dragged him toward the kneeling priest.

CHAPTER VI.

JOSE MENENDEZ SUSPECTS THE TRUTH.

AT the sight of the Indian standing at the summit of the flight of steps leading up to the ruined temple Jose Menendez and Oliver Elmore, of course, came to a sudden halt.

Again the Indian waved them back, uttering several sentences in Spanish with great rapidity.

Then turning, he hastily entered one of the low doorways and disappeared.

"What did he say?" whispered Oliver, catching Joe by the arm.

"To keep back if we valued our lives," was the hurried reply. "Look here, Noll, I think we'd better be getting out of this."

"But the Yucatan Indians are all civilized, ain't they? Perhaps that fellow knows something about Harry. I wish he'd given you time to ask a question or two."

"Civilized are they? That's just where you make a mistake. I tell you, Noll, the Campeachy Indians are as wild as in the days of Cortez. There's no use in talking. We've got to get out of this now, whatever we may do later on."

And Joe, without the slightest hesitation, turned back into the forest, leaving Oliver no alternative but to follow or be left behind.

"Do you mean to tell me that these ruins are still inhabited?" he asked, as they hurried away from the temple with all possible speed.

"I don't say that, though this particular ruin evidently is at the present time, at least. I tell you what, I don't like this. When I was a boy my father used to come up here to cut mahogany, and he has often told me how the Indians of this region, although nominally professing to be Christians, at certain times in the year gather in their ancient temples and offer sacrifices to their idols still."

"What sort of sacrifices?" asked Oliver, with a shudder.

"Now, don't be alarmed, because I'm only telling you what they used to do in my father's time. It was believed then that on a certain day in every year they sacrificed a boy to one of the heathen gods—that's all I know."

"Joe! for Heaven's sake, you don't think——"

"That some of those fellows caught Harry last night? I wish I didn't think so, Noll, but I must confess I do."

Oliver shuddered again.

"This is perfectly dreadful!" he exclaimed. "Here we are as helpless as a couple of children, with no other weapon than a jack-knife. What are we going to do?"

"Not give up in despair at all events," returned the Nicaraguan. "Hold on now, we've gone far enough to be out of sight. Now let's stop and think."

"But what can we do? Of course we might be good for one Indian, but——"

"But there may be, and probably are, twenty others beside him in that building. Oliver, we must do something. I have read all about these Indians, and heard people talk about their habits ever since I was a boy. I tell you I don't like that feather head-dress—that's what worries me most of all."

"The head-dress! Why so?"

"Because they never wear it except at the time when they secretly assemble to worship their idols. That particular dress is the one formerly worn by the old Maya priests."

"What do you mean by Maya priests?"

"Maya is the general name for all Yucatan Indians. But come; if Harry Hudson is in that building I propose to know it. Suppose we skirt around it through the woods and see how it looks behind."

They did so.

To penetrate the dense tropical jungle took time, and more than half an hour had elapsed before the boys suddenly found themselves at the foot of the terrace upon which stood the ruined temple.

They had come upon it in the rear.

"Hush!" whispered Joe, drawing back behind the trunk of a great sapota tree. "Let us listen a moment."

For a few moments they remained motionless.

Save for the monotonous hum of insects all about them, not a sound was to be heard.

Directly in front, opening into the little side building on the right of the temple at the foot of the terrace, was a low doorway toward which the Nicaraguan now stealthily crept.

"I'm going to take my chances, Noll," he whispered. "Indians or no Indians, I must know if Harry Hudson is inside here. I can talk to these fellows, you can't. Perhaps you'd better stay behind."

"Not much!" returned Oliver, divining his companion's generous motive. "Where you go, I go, Joe, and don't make any mistake about it. Lead the way,

I'll follow. No Californian ever went back on his partner yet, and you can bet your bottom dollar that Oliver Elmore ain't going to be the first to begin."

CHAPTER VII.

EXPLORING THE RUINS—A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"I SAY, Noll!"

"What is it, Joe?"

"That high-flown California talk of yours is all very well, but as penetrating into this old ruin is a risky business, wouldn't it be better to let me go in alone?"

And Jose Menendez drew back from the little door leading into the ruined temple, as Oliver Elmore, uttering the words quoted at the end of the last chapter, sprang forward to share the dangers of the proposed search.

"Why you any more than me?"

"There's no use in both of us running into a trap. I can speak Spanish, you know, and——"

"Go on!" whispered Oliver, pushing Joe through the door. "We'll stick together whatever happens. I understand what you mean. If the Indians were to catch you it would give me a chance to escape. I shan't allow anything of the sort, Joe. If I can't talk Spanish these Indians can at least understand a pair of Yankee fists. Go on, I'll show 'em. If poor Hudson is alive and kept a prisoner in this building, I propose to have him out."

Indeed, Oliver did not wait for Joe to act as guide, but, pushing ahead of the Nicaraguan, he took the lead himself.

Once inside the door the boys stopped to listen.

They found themselves standing in a long, narrow passage running parallel with the rear wall of the building.

It was low-studded, filled with loose stones and rubbish, and, moreover, insufferably hot. There was not a sound to be heard.

"They are in some of the rooms above if anywhere," whispered Joe. "There was one of these old buildings on my father's plantation; in fact, you find them all over Central America in one shape or another. They are all built on the same plan, and there should be a stairway here somewhere, if we can only find it out."

Together they advanced along the passage.

There were innumerable little niches opening from it, looking like cells in a prison; in one of these the stairway was presently found.

It was of stone, like everything else about the temple, and so choked up with rubbish as to make it seem impossible that it could have been made use of in many years.

"Can you hear anything?" breathed Joe, stopping again. "We can't go up here without making noise enough to wake the dead."

They stood for a moment listening.

All was perfectly quiet above.

Oliver, without speaking, began the ascent of the staircase, climbing over the rubbish as quietly as possible, Joe keeping close behind him until the top was reached.

They now found themselves in a broader passage, less choked with rubbish, with several arched doorways opening off on either side.

As they were about to advance there came a sudden whirring sound above them, and a great, black thing flitted past their faces, disappearing through one of the doorways beyond.

"Heavens! What's that?" breathed Oliver, starting back.

"Hush! It's only a bat. They grow to an enormous size down here. It's very singular, too."

"What is singular?"

"That the creature should be here at all. They don't lodge where man is—I can tell you that much. Unless this building was deserted that bat wouldn't be here."

And certainly it did seem as though the temple was deserted.

It was perfectly light where they now stood, one of the doorways at the end of the passage apparently communicating with the open air.

If the Indian priest of the temple or any of his followers was disposed to dispute the progress of the young explorers, it was time that they had made their presence known, that was clear.

Creeping along the passage to its end, the boys passed out of the low doorway through which the light penetrated, discovering to their surprise that they stood upon the top of the broad flight of steps in front of the temple in the same position occupied by the priest when he had ordered them back not half an hour before.

"We ain't making much headway, Noll."

"I should say not. What we want is to see the inside of this old shebang. Let's go back, Joe, and try one of the other doors."

The first doorway on the left of the passage was the one selected.

It communicated with a large vaulted apartment paved with great flat stones.

In its center stood a round stone altar with a particularly ugly-looking idol behind it.

Except for broken stones, which proved to be the remains of sculptured statues of men and animals scattered about here and there, nothing else was to be seen.

"There's nothing here, Noll."

"No sign of Hudson, at all events. But look at these stones, Joe? Wouldn't Professor Longmore go crazy if he could once get his hands on them. Oh, look here! What's this?"

As he spoke, Oliver Elmore sprang forward and picked up something from the floor immediately in front of the altar.

It was a broad blue ribbon, badly soiled, having apparently been trampled in the dust.

"Do you see that, Joe?" he exclaimed, holding it up. "Hudson has been here—there can be no doubt of it. He wore that about his neck last night."

"It's just as I feared," breathed the Nicaraguan. "The Indians did get him. Noll, this is terrible! What are we going to do?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Keep on searching, I suppose. Do you think they've killed him?"

"I'm afraid so. Quick! let us look into some of the other rooms."

Knowing what Jose Menendez knew, it was a bold undertaking; yet neither of the boys hesitated a moment in the search.

Room after room was explored, but in vain.

Broken statuary, carved stones and other precious relics which would have been worth a fortune in New York were found scattered about everywhere, but for further trace of Harry Hudson they searched in vain.

Neither was anything to be seen of the Indian who had appeared at the top of the steps.

The ruins were entirely deserted. It seemed hard to believe that they had seen the man at all.

Having visited every room on the main floor of the ancient building, the young explorers determined to ascend the towers, taking first the one on the side furthest from the shore.

There was a narrow flight of steps leading up into

this tower, even more choked up by rubbish than those below.

Passing out of the square opening, the boys found themselves with an uninterrupted view of the country for many miles around.

To the left was the sea, sparkling in the morning sunlight; to the right the dense forest extended as far as the eye could reach.

As they directed their gaze toward the latter, a sudden exclamation burst simultaneously from the lips of both Oliver and Joe.

Far in the distance, crossing an elevation bare of tree—the only open space in the unbroken line of the forest—a number of Indians could be seen moving along, two abreast, in a westerly direction, with a young man dressed in ordinary clothes walking in their midst.

"It's Hudson!" cried the Nicaraguan. "Look! Noll, look! It can be no one else! They've got him and are carrying him off. Heavens! how terrible. His doom is sealed!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARCH THROUGH THE FOREST—A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

HARRY HUDSON, in the hands of his captor and being dragged toward the altar in the midst of the strange assemblage within the ruined temple, felt all hope that his life would be spared might as well be abandoned at once.

It was perfectly evident that the Indians were engaged in celebrating some religious ceremony, and the presence of the naked youth who lay bound upon the altar before the idol made the nature of that ceremony only too plain.

It was an impressive sight.

The crowd of half-naked savages, in their wild, fantastic costumes, the kneeling priest, the sacrifice upon the altar, all seen by the light of the torches held in the hands of the row of boys who stood like statues immovable, combined to render the scene awe-inspiring in the extreme.

The mental agony endured by the unhappy youth as the full horror of his situation burst upon him can better be imagined than described.

Better that he had perished in the ocean than to be reserved for a fate like this.

Having approached within three feet of the kneeling priest, the Indian, still maintaining his vise-like grip upon Harry's arm, paused and waited.

Instantly the circle closed around them.

Dusky faces were seen peering into his own in whichever direction Harry turned his head.

Meanwhile the priest never moved, although he could not possibly have been ignorant of the disturbance which had occurred.

He seemed to be invoking the idol, for his lips were perpetually moving as though in prayer, and it was evident that he had no intention of allowing himself to be disturbed until he was through.

Ten—fifteen—twenty minutes passed.

The Indians stood motionless, the kneeling priest continued to pray.

The situation was becoming horrible.

A thousand times better that Harry should have his fate decided at once than to remain in suspense like this.

Of course the eyes of the captive were everywhere.

At the very beginning of this dreadful event he saw the boy upon the altar slowly turning his head, and

a pair of soft eyes met his own, filled with an expression of intense relief.

The glance was not reassuring.

It could mean but one thing—that at the termination of the priestly prayer the captive upon the altar would be freed and he himself substituted in his place.

Suddenly the Indian priest seemed to come to the end of his praying.

Springing to his feet, he prostrated himself three times before the idol, then turned and faced his companions in the room.

A wild shout went up among them.

All gathered about Harry Hudson now, pulled him this way and that, breaking the mystic circle and chattering in a strange tongue like so many magpies.

The priest seemed to question Harry's captor to answer, while the other Indians joined in with their suggestions in a go-as-you-please fashion, creating a terrific din.

What were they talking about?

Himself, of course, but what particular connection Harry could only guess.

The happenings of the next ten minutes seemed to enlighten him in a measure.

During that time the priest had advanced toward the altar and cut the cords which bound the young Indian.

Almost at the same instant Harry Hudson was seized, his pockets rifled, and himself bound and carried by four of the Indians down into a dirty underground chamber and thrown upon the floor.

Here milk and fruit were brought him, and he was invited to eat.

Evidently there was no immediate intention of sacrificing him to the idol, whatever might be the nature of the programme later on.

To sleep was impossible. The air of the underground chamber was hot and stifling, and in spite of the total darkness which prevailed, Harry was made aware, by various noises occurring from time to time, that his captors sat in the open doorway, ready to pounce upon him if he made a move.

But why dwell on the terrors of the night?

Morning came at last, and after a breakfast of bananas and a sort of dried meat, about as palatable as shavings, the captive was led back into the hall above.

It was now evident that the Indians were about to vacate the temple.

The great hall presented a far different appearance from the previous night—daylight showed it to be a mass of dirt and ruins—nothing more.

By the Indians not a word was spoken.

Silently forming themselves in a procession, they marched down a flight of steps and out of the temple by the very door in the rear through which Jose Menendez and Oliver Elmore were to enter a few minutes later on.

With his hands tied behind him, Harry walked in the midst of this procession, the Indian who had attacked him on the rock acting as his especial keeper and moving by his side.

A long and weary tramp through the dense tropical forest followed.

Hour after hour the tramp continued without any change in the surrounding scene.

At noon they halted beside a rushing river, lighted a fire, toasting bananas, and making a decoction resembling coffee from a sort of black bean, of which Harry was given his share.

Crossing the river on a raft, somewhere toward four o'clock they reached the base of a mountain range, which for hours previous had been visible

ahead of them, and a tedious ascent up among the clouds began.

During the entire journey not one of the Indians had shown a disposition to treat their captive unkindly.

He had been helped over rough places, and food had been urged upon him at times when the others had none.

Of course no one spoke to him, for this would have been useless, but many times during the tedious march the Indian boy who had lain bound upon the altar would steal up beside him, and when the others were not looking, press his hand reassuringly, sending the most friendly glances from his eyes.

These things only served to puzzle our hero the more.

Where they were taking him, or for what fate he was reserved, he could only surmise.

Certainly if they had wished to offer him as a sacrifice to their idol, they had had every opportunity to do so, as he was powerless to offer resistance to anything they might choose to do.

At last, just as the sun seemed to rest upon the tips of the mountain peaks to the westward, a broad table-land was reached, and the party came to a halt.

Never had Harry Hudson witnessed a scene so grand.

They had passed beyond the wooded lowlands of the coast, and were now high up on the range of the great Central American *Cordilleras*, as they are termed; mountains with snow-capped peaks rising above them on every side.

The position was no sooner gained than every man among the Indians advanced toward the very edge of the declivity and prostrated themselves to the ground.

Harry looked, and beheld far beneath them, reposing in a valley entirely surrounded by the highest mountains, a city made up of innumerable buildings, similar in form to the ruin they had left behind them, their whitened towers reflecting back the rays of the setting sun.

Left to himself, Harry could only gaze in wonder.

In every particular the city which he now beheld differed from anything he had seen pictured before.

It could not be a Spanish settlement. He had posted himself on this point, and knew exactly how these ought to appear.

It was at this juncture that Harry felt someone suddenly touch him on the back.

"Don't speak! Don't look around!" whispered a voice from behind him. "The city that you see is the last stronghold of the Maya Indians of Yucatan. Once its gates close upon you no power on earth can prevent your death, but I have sworn it, and will save you if I can!"

CHAPTER IX.

TISBERT TOD TURNS UP AGAIN.

It was indeed as Jose Menendez had said.

Though impossible to distinguish the features of the young man who moved among the Indians, the two explorers from Dr. Tuckerman's school had seen enough to be convinced that the captive was Harry Hudson and no one else.

As they continued to gaze at the retreating forms the last of the procession passed over the clearing, and the forest swallowing them up, they were seen no more.

The two boys looked at each other without speaking a word.

A gloom had fallen over them which nothing could thrust aside.

"Look here, Joe!" exclaimed Oliver at length; "this is our fault. When that Indian first showed himself at the head of the stairs Hudson was undoubtedly inside here. We ought——"

"Hello! Hello! Is anyone here?"

In the midst of Oliver's remark a voice was heard to shout these words from beneath them.

Overjoyed at the sound of the English language, both the boys ran to the side of the tower nearest the steps and leaned over, looking down.

A man stood upon the top of the steps looking curiously about him.

His head was tied up in a flaming red handkerchief; he wore neither coat nor vest, and his nether garment was torn and soiled.

In spite of these changes, however, our explorers recognized an old acquaintance at a glance.

It was Mr. Tisbert Tod, late their fellow passenger in the steamer Honduras.

"Hooray!" shouted Oliver. "A boat from the steamer must have come in search of us. If there are only enough aboard we may succeed in rescuing Harry yet."

"A boat from the Honduras!"

The cry was echoed by Joe, and without waiting to exchange greetings with the somewhat damaged Mr. Tod, the boys ran down the tower stairs and out upon the broad platform at the top of the steps.

"Mr. Tod! You here! Where are the rest of you?" cried Oliver, running eagerly up to him. "Quick! There's no time to be lost. The Indians are carrying Harry Hudson off into the woods!"

Instead of immediately replying, Mr. Tisbert Tod drew back in a dramatic way and clapped his hand to his head.

His face was pale, his teeth chattered.

He looked like a man suffering from an attack of the ague, a virulent fever, or something of the sort.

"Harry Hudson—Indians—woods!" he replied, slowly. "Gentlemen, you take my breath away! I—I did not expect to find you here. I understood that Harry Hudson was drowned."

"Never mind that," interposed Jose Menendez, quickly. "Where are the rest of your party, Mr. Tod? Really, there is no time to be lost. Hudson was captured by the Indians. We just saw them dragging him into the forest from the top of this tower. If we are to save him we must start on the trail at once."

"The rest of my party, Senor Menendez? The rest of my party? Do I look like a man with a party? What you tell me is painful, surely, but I can render you no assistance. I am, as you see me, alone."

"Do you mean to tell us——"

"That I fell overboard from the Honduras? Yes. I have passed a night of peril. Only my undaunted courage and my excellent skill as a swimmer saved me. I repeat"—Mr. Tod was always repeating—"I am, as you see me, a castaway on an unknown shore, penniless, almost starved—alone!"

It was a bitter disappointment to the young explorers.

When the story of Mr. Tisbert Tod came to be told they realized the helpless condition in which they all three stood.

In spite of the man's absurd manner of speech, they were sincerely glad to welcome a companion in their misery.

On board the Honduras they had been barely civil to Tisbert Tod; now they received him with open arms.

Indeed, he was in a worse fix than themselves, being hatless and without coat or vest, and having been

severely bruised by the rocks in attempting to land during the storm of the night before.

Thus reinforced, Joe and Oliver determined to resolve upon some plan of action without delay.

First the cravings of hunger must be satisfied; next, come what would, they were determined to penetrate into the country in the direction taken by the Indians, and attempt the rescue of Harry Hudson.

At least they could only fail.

To this part of the programme Tod, when he had heard their story, vehemently objected.

He was for following up the coast to the town of Campeachy, which he thought could not be more than eighty miles distant.

Of course he was overruled.

Not for a moment would either of the boys listen to a proposition to abandon their friend.

Returning to the shore, they were fortunate in finding some excellent oysters, which with bananas—they grew everywhere—afforded them as substantial a breakfast as one could wish.

It was then that work commenced in earnest.

With some difficulty Joe discovered the trail taken by the Indians, and the tramp through the forest began.

Tisbert Tod, still objecting, accompanied them.

It was Hobson's choice with Mr. Tod.

Oliver and Joe would not go this way.

Either he must go theirs or be left behind.

Night found them deep in the tropical jungle with torn clothes, faces and hands bleeding from contact with the impenetrable thickets, footsore and weary, ready to give up in despair.

They had long ago missed the trail upon which they had started.

The further they went the more dense the woods seemed to grow.

They were lost in the forests of Yucatan.

"I told you so—I told you so!" whined Tisbert Tod, as they pushed through a dense thicket of underbrush, only to encounter one still more impenetrable. "I told you so, but you wouldn't heed me. If ever there was a consummate piece of folly, this is it. Oh, Lord! what now? Save me! Save me! I'm sinking in the mud!"

They had come to an opening in the forest at last.

Tisbert Tod was ahead, and as he pushed through the last thicket he was suddenly plunged up to his waist in a mass of black, slimy mud.

Before them was a broad rushing river, upon which they had come suddenly and without warning.

A step further and both the boys would have shared the fate of Tisbert Tod.

"Quick, Noll! Catch hold of one of his arms!" shouted Joe. "Look out how you step there, unless you want a mud bath, too. It is the Usamasinta, the great river of Yucatan. To cross it is impossible. We've come to the end of our rope at last."

The rescue of Tod was accomplished, but not without difficulty.

In the operation Oliver managed to get one leg in the mud himself.

The situation of the explorers was now desperate in the extreme.

To attempt to go back was impossible in their present condition. Further advance was out of the question, until daylight at least.

There was nothing for it but to stand huddled together upon the quaking earth of the thicket, wondering what would happen next.

"I shall catch some dreadful fever and die, I know I shall!" whined Tisbert Tod. "I was a fool to listen to you fellows!"

"You are no worse off than we are, Mr. Tod," re-

turned Oliver, roughly. "Look here, I can't stand this any longer. At the risk of another mud bath, we must push up the shore—at least we may find a place where we can lie down and sleep, and——"

"Hark!" interrupted Joe. "I thought I heard voices—someone singing."

All stood motionless, listening.

The sound of wild, unearthly music was certainly to be heard in the distance among the trees.

Now rising, now falling, it seemed to draw nearer and nearer, until the sounds appeared close beside them, and still nothing was to be seen.

CHAPTER X.

PEDRO.

It was a trying situation for Harry Hudson.

The kneeling Indians were before him, and no one could tell at what instant they might complete their devotions and rise.

Who had spoken to him in the English language?

That was the puzzling part of it. Still, there was nothing to do but to heed the words of the speaker and remain motionless, waiting for further developments.

Nor was the wait a long one.

A moment later and Harry felt two hands moving about his ankles with great caution.

Someone was untying his shoes.

"Step out of your shoes," whispered a voice presently.

Harry noiselessly obeyed.

"Move backward," whispered the voice again.

"Keep your eyes upon the old priest, Bartolo. If he makes a motion to rise halt at once."

Step by step Harry Hudson moved backward over the rock, his eyes fixed upon the kneeling priest.

It was a terrible situation.

He did not know who was behind him—he dared not look.

It might be all treachery, and he at any moment find himself stepping backward over a precipice, or tumbling down the mountain-side.

Presently he found himself passing among trees, which had no sooner closed in front of him, obstructing his view of the kneeling Indians, than the presence of the hand was upon his arm again, this time pulling him around.

It was the Indian boy who had lain upon the altar in the ruined temple.

Remembering his friendly glances during the march through the forest, the sight of his handsome face did not altogether take Harry by surprise.

He was about to speak, when the boy raised his finger warningly to his lips.

Then, motioning to Harry to follow him with one hand, while he grasped the shoes with the other, he led the way through a clump of trees, disclosing a well-beaten path down the mountain-side.

"Be quick, if you value your life!" he breathed. "They will not be through with their praying for some moments yet; we want to put as wide a space between us as we can before they discover our escape."

Quick work followed.

Still in his stocking feet, and heedless of bleeding feet and the roughness of the rocky way, Harry followed the Indian boy down the mountain.

It was a different path from the one by which they had come.

By no means so rocky, and less obstructed with bushes and trees.

At length, finding himself upon a thickly wooded

shelf overlooking the valley, the Indian paused, and with an exclamation of satisfaction flung himself down before Harry Hudson, and kissed his hand again and again.

"We are safe for the moment," he said, "and you need not doubt that I will save your life, for you saved mine."

"I saved your life?"

"You did. If my father had not found you just as he did, they would have sacrificed me to that stone god of theirs. You bet I'll never go back to the old man again."

There was a curious mixture of sentiment and slang about the boy's speech and manner, which, in spite of the gravity of the situation, forced from Harry a smile.

"Look here; who are you and what's your name?" he whispered. "Tell me what all this means? These things have followed one another so rapidly, that I'm all mixed up."

"My name is Pedro. What's yours?"

"Hudson—Harry Hudson."

"How did you happen to be down there on the shore?"

"I fell overboard from a steamer."

"Just what I told the old man!" cried the young Indian, displaying his teeth. "Say, you haven't got any Yankee tobacco about you, I s'pose? I haven't had a chew since I left Belize."

"No, I haven't, but I wish I had for your sake," replied Harry, laughing. "Pedro, if you only had a few more clothes on you I should think——"

"That I was a Yankee myself. Well, I am almost one. Look here; I want to tell you all about it, and we can't afford to waste much time, so listen and don't interrupt me until I am through."

"All right—go ahead."

"I'm a full-blooded Indian, though you mayn't think it," began the boy, looking warily about him. "When I was a little chap my old man gave me to some mahogany cutters up the Usamasinta river, and they took me back with them to the English settlements at Belize. I've lived down there ever since, and am more English than Indian now. Like a fool I thought I'd come up here and see the old man—you can bet your life I'll never try it again."

"You see he was mad to think that I had changed so, and that's where the trouble was. So was Bartolo——"

"You mean the priest?"

"Yes. He is a priest among my people. They pretend to be good Catholics, but they ain't anything of the sort. Once every year they meet in that temple and sacrifice a boy to their god, just as they used to do in old times."

"But how came they to choose you?"

"Because they didn't want me to go back to Belize. First my father consented, but afterward he was sorry. That's what made him go out to look for someone else to take my place. You see the way of it is if another boy is brought into the temple before the sacrifice, they look upon it as a sign from the god that the life of the victim is to be spared."

"But why didn't they take me instead? I thought every minute they were going to."

"Ah! you don't understand their religion," replied the boy. "There must be two weeks' preparation. They would have taken you down the mountain to the city you saw beneath you. There they live just as they did before the Spaniards came to Yucatan. No white man has ever entered that city, nor does anyone know that it exists. Once they got you there nothing could save you, nor me either, for that matter, for

they would never let me out again. I'm going back to Belize."

"Is it far?"

"Oh, yes. A long way. We must get to the river, and there wait for some raft to take us down. Here, put on your shoes—you will walk easier. I suppose you will go with me—there is nothing else for you to do."

"Go with you? Of course I will!" exclaimed Harry. "It's my only chance. If you will get me out of this dreadful country, Pedro, you shall never want for anything as long as I live."

"We'll go together, then," replied the Indian boy. "I haven't forgotten these forests. We shall have no trouble."

And together they started down the mountain-side.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE MAHOGANY RAFT.

"HARK! Don't you hear it? It is just over there among the trees!"

"Of course I hear it. What do you suppose it can mean? There, it is dying away again. I can't understand it at all."

And our school-boy explorers, huddled together in the swamp close to the river's bank, stood listening to the wild music heard in the darkness, now slowly dying away.

"Whatever it is we have heard the last of it," grumbled Tisbert Tod, who was clinging to a tree, afraid to move a step. "Hark! Did you hear that sudden splash just off to the right? Do you know what that means?"

"No, I'm sure I don't," answered Oliver Elmore.

"Nor you, Senor Menendez?"

The Nicaraguan shuddered.

"It means that we had better keep quiet," he exclaimed. "That splash would mean an alligator down where I belong."

"And it means the same here—it means the same here," continued Tod, repeating his words in his usual style.

"This is a pretty fix you have brought me into. I ought to have known better. I was a fool—a fool to come with you at all!"

"Why don't you go back, then?" suggested Oliver. "You are no worse off than we are, yet you are perpetually grumbling. Hark! there is the singing again!"

As Oliver spoke, the voices suddenly burst upon them, chanting the same wild song.

If the face of Tisbert Tod could have been seen at that moment, the boys would have perceived upon it an expression of relief.

"Does mahogany grow in Nicaragua, Senor Menendez?" he inquired, in his provokingly measured tones.

"I never saw any—why do you ask?"

"Then I know some things about Central American forests that you do not. That singing is on a raft coming down the river. It passed around a bend—that is why we lost it. They are the mahogany cutters going home."

"By George, I believe you are right!" exclaimed Joe. "I can hear the words now. They are singing in Spanish, and about mahogany cutting, too. We must get close to the bank some way and try to hail them as they pass."

Even as he spoke, a bright light could be seen among trees moving rapidly toward them.

"This way, this way!" shouted Tod, leaping from one tree to another, to avoid the mud between. "Hail

them in Spanish there! It's our only chance to get out of this infernal swamp."

They gained the edge of the stream with difficulty.

Clinging to the trees, and standing knee deep in the mud, all looked out ahead.

It was a welcome sight that met the eyes of the explorers.

There, just ahead of them, was a great raft of logs moving rapidly down the rushing stream.

Upon the raft were fifteen or twenty men, mostly Indians, and seen by the light of several flaring torches which were fastened between the logs in front, looked wild and picturesque enough.

Some were guiding the raft by means of long poles; others were clustered about a white man, who was sitting on a sort of bench playing a guitar; all were singing at the top of their voices, as the strange craft shot along through the overhanging trees.

"Confound their squaking! They won't hear us!" growled Tod. "Hello there, senor! Hello, hello!"

And, to the surprise of both his companions, Mr. Tod rattled off a lot of Spanish quite as easily as though it had come from Joe himself.

His cry was heard.

Flinging down his guitar, the white man seized a torch and rushed to the edge of the raft.

"Hello! Who calls?" he cried in Spanish.

The Indians joined him, ceasing in their song.

It was a weird sight.

The great raft, the naked Indians, the rushing river and the flaring torches, all combined to produce a scene destined to dwell in the memory of the school-boy explorers for many years to come.

"Here, here! We are lost in the swamp!" yelled Tod, speaking in Spanish, as before.

"Ah! God be praised, I see them!" cried the white man.

He gave some hurried orders to his dusky crew, at the same time shouting words of encouragement to the explorers on the river bank.

Presently the prow of the great raft was seen to turn.

It moved slowly, but steadily.

Clearing the channel at last, the Indian succeeded in bringing its head around in such a manner as to permit Tod and the boys to leap on board.

Then with rapid poling the bulky mass was pushed back into the channel again, and went shooting down the stream.

The conversation which followed was in Spanish.

Of course Oliver Elmore did not understand a word of it, though its general import was explained to him later on by Joe.

"Gentlemen, who are you? How came you in the forest?" was the first greeting of the man on the raft.

"Tell him, you," whispered Tod to Joe.

Joe explained.

"Well, it's lucky I happened to hear your shouts. My boys, here, make such an infernal noise when they get to singing, that it is a chance we didn't get by.

"Left on the coast, were you? You did well to run across me. I've been cutting mahogany up the river, and am on my way to Campeachy, d'ye see."

"Can we go with you?"

"Certainly. Only too happy. There's grub enough, I guess; if there ain't we stop at Tecax—that's a town a little below here—for more. It's lucky some of the unconverted Indians didn't get hold of you and carry you into the mountains. There's lots of them in these parts, and I want you to understand they are mighty bad citizens to meet in the woods."

This called Joe to the recollection of Harry Hudson. In as few words as possible he related to the raft

owner—who had already introduced himself to them under the name of Perez—all that had occurred.

"Do you think they have carried our friend into the mountains?" he added, while Mr. Tod stood eagerly listening for Senor Perez's reply.

"There ain't a doubt of it. They are a wicked lot, and this season of the year is a sort of holy time with them. There's a whole nest of them back among the mountains, where they live in one of the ruined cities that are found everywhere in Yucatan. Folks do say that they offer up boys to their heathen idols, and I wouldn't wonder if it were true. What's your friend's name?"

"Harry Hudson."

"Well, I'm afraid it's all up with him, poor fellow. If I wasn't in such a hurry to get to Campeachy with my raft, I'd stop at Tecax and get up a party to go in search of him. Some of my boys here could guide us, and would, if I asked them. However, it is something to have rescued you and your friends. By the way, what is your name?"

"Jose Menendez."

"Where are you from?"

"Oh, I live in Nicaragua; that's where we were bound when the accident occurred."

"What! You don't mean to tell me that you are the son of my old friend, Juan Menendez, of Leon, Nicaragua?"

"But I am, though."

"Why, I know your father well! Look here, I would like to do you a good turn; we'll stop at Tecax, anyway, and see what can be done for your friend."

"Is it far?"

"Only a couple of miles now. Around that bend ahead of us we pass the ruined city of Izamal—Tecax is just beyond."

Now, although he did not speak, upon Tisbert Tod nothing of these remarks were lost.

"They shall not rescue him, if I can help it," he muttered. "Let them plan as much as they like. Wouldn't those two fellows be surprised if they only knew that the little Indian village of Tecax here in the Yucatan forests was as familiar to me as New York!"

Biting his lip, Mr. Tisbert Tod walked to the stern of the great mahogany raft, and stood looking out upon the river, watching their rapid progress among the trees.

They had now entered upon one of the swiftest rapids of the Usamasinta.

It was fortunate for our young friends that it was not at this point they had come out of the forest, for to stop the bulky craft now would have been an impossible thing.

As they swept around the point spoken of by Captain Perez, a strange scene burst upon them.

On the opposite bank of the river, plainly visible in the moonlight, lay a ruined city, extending along the shore for fully a mile.

Here were temples similiar to the one into which Harry Hudson had been taken, scattered about by the dozen, pyramids, stone columns, great buildings in all sorts of singular shapes—all in ruins—were everywhere to be seen.

Joe and Oliver, standing beside the captain, gazed upon this remarkable scene in silent amazement as the raft shot past it.

"Strange place, ain't it?" remarked Captain Perez.

"It is the ruined city of Izamal, and must at one time been the seat of a dense population. No one knows who built it—not even the Indians themselves—or at least if they do they will not tell."

"Wouldn't Professor Longmore go wild if he could only get in there?" whispered Oliver.

"I should say so," replied Joe. "It beats anything I ever saw in Nicaragua all hollow. If we only had time to explore it now— Good heavens! Noll! Look there! Look there!"

Oliver looked in the direction indicated.

On the shore, standing in front of a great stone building, were two persons gesticulating wildly, and shouting with the evident desire to attract the attention of those upon the raft.

One was a half-naked boy, the other a young man in American dress.

"Stop her, stop her, captain!" cried Joe, as all looked toward the ruins. "It's Harry Hudson! There! don't you see? For Heaven's sake stop the raft!"

CHAPTER XII.

TECAX.

"CAN'T we go to-night?"

"Impossible, senor."

"But think of our friend? I will see that you are well paid."

"Couldn't go if it were to rescue the Governor of Yucatan himself, senor. There ain't an Indian in Tecax who would venture among the ruins of Izamal at night."

It was at the little Indian village of Tecax, in the very heart of the forests of Yucatan.

It had been impossible to stop the progress of the raft in that swift current, or even to attempt to approach nearer to the ruined city on the shore.

All that Oliver and Joe could do was to shout to Harry to keep up his courage and remain where he was, promising him rescue later on.

Harry had seen them, and shouted in return.

Then like a flash the raft swept by him, and turning a bend in the river disappeared.

Had Mr. Tisbert Tod seen and heard all this?

Assuredly he had, and if the truth were known, he derived no great amount of satisfaction from the sight.

Still he said but little, and when, upon the arrival of the raft at Tecax, Joe, Oliver and Captain Perez hurried to the house of the *alcalde*, or mayor of the town, to try and get up a company to start back at once to the ruined city, Tisbert Tod managed to stay behind.

"It's strange what has become of Mr. Tod," said Oliver, when after the positive refusal of the *alcalde* to help them that night they found themselves together with the raft captain in the *posada*, a rickety frame building with no other floor than the earth, which was the only hotel of which Tecax could boast.

"It is strange," answered Joe. "Do you know, Noll, I don't like that fellow. We will certainly succeed in rescuing Harry in the morning, then we must shake this Tod—let him toddle off somewhere else; anywhere so long as we are rid of him, I say."

Leaving the guests at the *posada* to regale themselves as best they can on fried eggs, *tortillas*, or Mexican flap-jacks and black beans—another common dish in Yucatan—let us follow the footsteps of Mr. Tisbert Tod, and endeavor to learn what his singular assertion that he was as familiar with Tecax as he was with New York could possibly mean.

Tisbert Tod had gone ashore with the others.

Instead of following Joe and Oliver to the house of the *alcalde* he had slipped behind a small warehouse which stood on the only wharf Tecax possessed and waited until they had passed out of sight.

Now, there were two streets in Tecax. The one chosen by the raft captain and his companions ex-

tended up the side of a slight elevation, the other—there were no more—ran along the shore for a rod or two, ending abruptly at the edge of a forest beyond.

It was this shore street that Mr. Tod selected.

As he moved rapidly among the wretched huts which lined it on either side he looked curiously about him with the air of a man returning after a long absence to a familiar scene.

"It looks just the same—just the same," he muttered. "I wonder if Diego is alive yet? Won't he be astonished to see me! When I was a traveling photographer and spent two weeks in Tecax ten years ago Diego was as rascally a thief as the town could produce. If he is alive he is probably just the same now."

"To think that Harry Hudson should have escaped after all," he continued. "It is simply marvelous. When I heard the wild Indians of the mountains had captured him I set him down as already dead. I may as well finish the job once I've undertaken it. From this place there'll be no difficulty in reaching the coast. Then for New York, Dan Hudson, and the reward."

He had now come abreast of a hut even more wretched than those which surrounded it.

Looking about him warily, and perceiving that he was not observed, he knocked softly at the door.

It was presently opened, and a villainous-looking one-eyed Indian appeared.

"Holy Saints! Senor Tod! Can this be you?"

"As you see, Diego. I trust you are well after these many years."

Of course the words were in Spanish—it is only the translation which we give.

Of what passed between Mr. Tisbert Tod and his friend Diego we have no knowledge.

It was fully half an hour before the door of the hut opened again.

"You are sure we can manage the canoe against that current?" whispered Tod, as, in company with the one-eyed Indian, they moved toward the bank of the river at a point considerably below the wharf.

"Trust me, senor. For the reward you have promised I could paddle against the current of the Usamasinta were it twice as strong. Never fear, we will be at the ruins a little past midnight. There will be plenty of time for you to interview your friend."

Thus, while Oliver and Joe were put off until morning before proceeding to the rescue of Harry Hudson, Tisbert Tod had managed to lose no time.

"I'll fix him," he muttered, as the canoe moved past the now deserted mahogany raft. "Twice you have escaped me, Harry Hudson. In the third attempt I shall not fail."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER AMONG THE RUINS.

"THEY have gone, senor! They have gone!"

"I see they have gone, Pedro; but no matter. My friends saw me—how they came to be here in the forest, I can't imagine, but having once seen me, they will return again."

"They cannot return against that swift current, senor. I made a mistake in coming here. We must go further up the river if we hope to get on the mahogany raft and ever reach Belize."

"Patience, Pedro," returned Harry Hudson, as he turned from the banks of the Usamasinta where he had watched the last glimmer of the raft torches disappear among the trees. "Some of them will be back after us, you may depend upon it. Let us stay exactly where we are and watch, and take my word for it, that is the safest plan."

The sudden vision of his school-boy companions together with Mr. Tisbert Tod upon the mahogany raft, had startled Harry Hudson tremendously.

Where had they come from?

He had never felt a doubt that Oliver and Joe, whom he had seen in the boat from the rock on the shore, had returned to the steamer and given him up long ago.

If the boys had suddenly dropped from the moon their appearance could not have been more unexpected than to see them suddenly fly past him thus.

As for the presence of Tod on the raft, Harry could not account for it at all.

He had not come to suspect that slow-spoken individual as the cause of his misfortunes, yet he somehow distrusted the man, without knowing exactly why.

But there was no mystery in Harry Hudson's own presence among the ruins of the ancient city of Izamal.

Guided by the Indian boy, Pedro, he had descended the mountain, reaching the river at this particular point.

It was most fortunate for Harry that he had so excellent a guide.

Pedro seemed to know the mountain and the forest thoroughly, and led the way in the darkness as unhesitatingly as if it had been broad daylight.

They had not proceeded far from the shelf of rock, which had been their first stopping place, when a loud shouting from above warned them that their escape had been discovered.

"Quick!" whispered Pedro, "climb this tree, señor. They will follow us; among the branches up there we'll find the best hiding-place in the world."

Pedro was right.

Crouching upon a limb amid the dense foliage of the tropical tree, the boys waited, listening.

Presently dusky forms were seen stealing past them, treading so noiselessly that Harry had not heard a sound.

Pedro made a gesture of defiance as they passed.

Then, as the moments sped on and the Indians did not return, he cautiously descended from his perch, and after a brief reconnoiter, announced that the coast was clear, and led Harry down the mountain by another path.

They had reached the ruined city, and being attracted by the lights on the raft had hurried to the shore only to see it speed by them in the manner described.

"I don't believe in waiting," muttered the Indian boy, doubtfully, as they climbed over the fallen columns and sculptured stone. "There is no telling what moment my people may come down upon us, you see."

"We can go no further to-night at all events," was the emphatic reply. "I am so tired that I can scarcely stand, and my feet are one mass of blisters—besides, I am as hungry as a bear."

"I'll soon fix that, señor. You stay here; I'll get all the bananas we can eat in no time. Perhaps you are right. We will do best to stay here until morning, but it won't do for both of us to sleep, or between the tiger cats and the Indians we may fare hard."

Pedro was as good as his word.

Bananas were better than nothing, and he soon returned with a supply of that excellent fruit greater than they could possibly eat.

It was then decided that Harry should do the first sleeping, while Pedro stood guard.

One of the lower steps of a terraced elevation leading up to a ruined temple was chosen.

It was a hard bed, but a cool one. The night air was so intolerably hot and close that the thought of

attempting to sleep inside the building was not to be entertained.

Stretching himself upon the stone with his coat for a pillow, Harry tried in vain to sleep.

Swarms of mosquitoes, strange cries from the forests, added to his excited state of mind, effectually preventing anything of the sort.

He gave it up at last and made Pedro take his place.

Then for the next few hours he wandered about among the ruins, lost in wonder at the scene of magnificent desolation which everywhere met his gaze.

It must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of midnight, when too tired to move another step, Harry Hudson seated himself upon a fallen column, superbly sculptured, at some distance further down the river's bank.

"If I only had one of these strange buildings in New York," he thought, "what a fortune it would be. How singular that so little is known about them—Hello! what have we here?"

He had been idly kicking at a small flat stone as he thus mused, and at this moment thrust it aside.

It disclosed a small cavity in the pavement, which he now perceived to be filled with a large number of little images of men with hideous heads and limbs distorted all out of shape.

They were evidently of some kind of metal, but were so covered with rust and dirt, that in the dim moonlight it was impossible to discover exactly what the metal was.

With Professor Longmore's museum in mind, Harry appropriated as many of these images as he could conveniently carry, and was in the act of rising, when stealthy footsteps behind him suddenly met his ear.

"Pedro, is that you?"

There was no answer.

Harry gazed about him in every direction but could see no one.

"I had better get back," he thought, a strange sensation of fear creeping over him. "It may be the Indians——"

He paused suddenly.

There directly in front of him, advancing from behind a great pile of stones, was Tisbert Tod, his late fellow passenger on the Honduras, the moonlight dimly glittering upon an open knife which he carried in his hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ALCALDE'S SECRET.

TECAX was a miserable place.

Those who have never seen a Spanish-American town can form but little idea how miserable it really was.

A few of the houses were of frame—made in New York, taken to pieces and shipped to Yucatan in great boxes, to be set up again in the forest—but the remainder were known in the language of the country as "adobe (pronounced doby) huts," that is, huts built of sun-dried mud.

The *posada* at which our friends, the school-boy explorers sat down to supper was one of the portable frame style of houses.

It swarmed with vermin; pigs, dogs and goats ran in and out the open doors.

Like many other similar patent contrivances, it was not exactly in working order, and the doors stood wide open at all hours of the day and night, having become so warped that they could not be shut, allowing the animals which filled the streets a chance to enter whenever they pleased.

It was just as they had finished their supper that Oliver Elmore and his friend Joe Menendez heard the customary evening salutation of Spanish countries, "*Buenos noches, senores*," behind them, and turning, beheld their new acquaintance, the *alcalde* of Tecax, bowing and scraping at the open door.

As Captain Perez had finished his supper and gone out some time previously, the boys saw at once that the call of the *alcalde* could be intended only for themselves.

Joe took the initiative, of course.

"Good-evening, *senor*."

"Gentlemen, good-evening," returned the *alcalde*—a half-breed by the way, with more Indian than Spanish blood in his veins—"I have come to impart to you a secret. I did not wish to speak before our friend Captain Perez—Holy Saint James protect us! Maledictions on that confounded pig!"

The speech of the *alcalde* of Tecax had suddenly been interrupted by a strolling pig, which being chased by a dog, had suddenly made a dart for the lighted interior of the *posada* and seeing no other road than between the *alcalde's* legs had chosen that, sending the official sprawling on the *posada* floor.

The dog followed of course.

For the next few minutes a succession of snarlings and squealings were the only sounds heard.

"I'll have every pig in Tecax killed to-morrow," grumbled the *alcalde* when order was restored at last, and both pig and dog expelled. "They've grown so thick lately that it's as much as a man's life is worth to walk the streets at all."

"How about the secret, *senor*?"

This from Joe.

"Ah, true! The secret! You are certain that you saw your lost friend up at the ruins of Izamal?"

"Of course we saw him."

"And, naturally, you would like to go to his rescue to-night? There are fevers lurking among those ruins, scorpions, centipedes, lions, tigers—"

"Here, here, *senor*!" exclaimed Joe, laughing, "what are you driving at? You know as well as I do there are no lions in Yucatan."

"But you want to get your friend away as soon as possible? Bad place those ruins. I'm the only man in Tecax who can take you to Izamal to-night."

"And you can do it?"

"Certainly."

"How? We'll agree to anything."

"Ah! that's my secret, gentlemen. I'm a poor man; the office as *alcalde* pays me next to nothing in this miserable hole. How much will you give me if I start you on the road to the ruins in half an hour's time?"

Lighting a cigarette, the *alcalde* began placidly smoking with the air of a man who had a hard bargain to drive.

Joe and Oliver consulted hastily.

"Offer him twenty dollars," said the latter.

"Twenty dollars! Why, man, it's more money than he's seen in a year! Wait, Noll; I know these people better than you do. I'll offer him five!"

The *alcalde* snapped up the offer at once.

It was at least five times as much as he had expected to get.

"Go down to the bank of the river in half an hour, and you'll find me ready," he said, promptly. "You want to say nothing to anyone, and go along about a hundred yards or so, just out of sight of Perez's raft. I'll fix you all right. We'll rescue your friend, never fear."

The boys could scarce restrain their impatience.

Of course they were at the river on time.

They found the *alcalde* waiting for them with a

substantial-looking dug-out, with two stout Indians as paddlers, ready for the voyage up the stream.

"Look here, how are you going up against that current?" asked Joe, as they pushed off from the shore.

"Ah! that is my secret, gentlemen," was the reply of the *alcalde*. "We could work up against it, but it would be a hard matter. I know a better way, and one I propose to keep to myself. You will never tell your friend, the captain, do you understand?"

The boys promised, of course.

For the first half mile it was hard paddling.

Only by keeping close to the shore were the Indians able to make any headway at all.

On both sides of the river the forest rose around them so dense that it seemed impossible that it could ever have been penetrated by the foot of man.

"How far do those woods extend, *senor*?" asked Joe.

"How far? A hundred miles if you follow the river; to the foot of the mountains in the other direction. Bad place to get lost in. I don't see how you ever managed to push your way through."

"Filled with ruins, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. You find them everywhere in Yucatan. I know of more than twenty ruined cities myself. This country must have been alive with inhabitants once, but there are few enough of us now."

They were close in under the overhanging trees at this time, and the *alcalde* was looking out sharply ahead.

Suddenly he gave utterance to a peculiar exclamation, and the canoe turned abruptly and shot in under the trees.

"Heads down!" cried the *alcalde*. "Here we are, gentlemen! This is my secret. Here is a set-off from the main river. It is as smooth as a mill pond, and will take us within a hundred yards of Izamal, joining the river again just below where the ruins begin."

They now found themselves in a narrow sluggish stream, winding about among the trees of the swampy shore.

It was impossible to see ahead beyond the length of the canoe, and the *alcalde* proceeded to light a torch which he fixed in position in a round hole evidently made for the purpose in the bow.

"Now we are all right," he exclaimed. "Paddle away, boys, and we'll soon be there. Before midnight we'll enter the river again and reach the ruins a few moments later on."

It turned out as the *alcalde* had predicted.

Nothing occurred to interrupt their progress, and in due time they emerged from the inland passage into the river again.

"There are the ruins," said the *alcalde*, pointing ahead. "Don't you see the building rising among the trees?"

"I see something moving away up there on the bank," said Joe, who was keeping a sharp lookout.

"Where?"

"There beyond that largest building. It's a number of men—look! Don't you see them?"

"Holy saints! I do see!" cried the *alcalde*, seizing the torch and dashing it into the water.

"It's a band of the unconverted Indians from the mountains. Heaven help your friend if he falls into their hands."

CHAPTER XV.

COWARDICE AND TREACHERY ON THE PART OF
TISBERT TOD.

"MR. TOD!"

Nothing could have been more startling than the

sudden appearance of his late fellow-passenger at the foot of the steps leading up to the ruined building before which Harry Hudson stood.

"As you see, Mr. Hudson. A bright night, sir—a bright night, but a trifle warm—yes, a trifle warm." The knife had disappeared now.

It had been suddenly thrust into some mysterious concealment about the person of Mr. Tod, and with a sickly smile upon his face, he approached Harry with extended hand.

The fact was Mr. Tisbert Tod was an arrant coward.

In company with his old acquaintance, Diego, he had ascended the river, landing at the ruins a few moments before.

Just there an accident occurred which materially altered the plan which the treacherous fellow had formed.

Killing was not Mr. Tod's business.

He could strangle a man in his sleep, or push him from a steamer's deck when his back was turned, but to meet him in a fair fight was entirely out of his usual style.

Therefore he had depended upon Diego to accomplish his purpose.

Instead of now being able to claim that assistance he found himself standing before his victim alone.

It was the result of the accident.

Upon reaching the ruins Diego had brought the canoe up against the bank with great difficulty, holding it in position while his passenger leaped ashore.

In his haste Tisbert Tod had pressed harder on the edge of the canoe than he had intended.

Instantly the clumsy affair turned bottom upward, and shot off down the stream.

"Diego! Diego!" breathed Tod, leaning as far over the bank as he dared.

Strange to say there was nothing of the Indian to be seen.

Breathlessly Tisbert Tod waited.

"He can't have sunk without rising," he said.

At that moment there was a sudden splash, and a huge alligator was seen to drop from a log and sink beneath the water.

"It's alligators!" thought the terror-stricken scoundrel. "This river is alive with them. One has certainly got Diego. Next thing it will be my turn."

He fled from the river bank precipitately.

It was just as well.

His friend Diego did not rise to the surface.

Tisbert Tod was left alone in the ruins to do his desperate work.

A moment later and it would have been all up with our hero.

Pretty capable of stabbing him in the back, Tisbert Tod, who had crept upon him, now concealed the knife and trembled before his victim's face.

Wholly unsuspecting of evil, Harry grasped the extended hand warmly.

"You were on that raft," he exclaimed. "Where are my friends? Pedro, Pedro! They have come at last!"

The Indian boy, awakened by the cry, came bounding toward them in a moment.

Tisbert Tod, usually so glib, now seemed at a loss for words.

"Your friends—your friends," he stammered. "Pardon me, Mr. Hudson, but you allude to Mr. Elmore and that young Spaniard, of course."

"Why, certainly. You were all on the raft together. I can't thank you all enough for leaving the steamer to come in search of me. I've got a strange story to tell, Mr. Tod. But where are Joe and Oliver? Down at the river bank?"

"They are not with me, Mr. Hudson. I am alone."

"Alone!"

"Yes. They put off coming until morning. I determined to hurry to your assistance at once. You see, I've been in this country before, Mr. Hudson, I've been in this country before. It was I who persuaded them to land and begin a search for you. I don't believe in delays, and wouldn't wait until morning, though I'm afraid we'll be obliged to do so now."

"Why so?"

"I accidentally upset the canoe in which I paddled up here alone in attempting the landing. Now there's no help for it. We'll have to wait until morning for the arrival of your slow moving friends."

"Mr. Tod, how can I ever repay you?" exclaimed Harry, and without the slightest hesitation he introduced Pedro, and gave an account of his adventures from the moment he had fallen from the steamer until now.

"Hum!" said Tisbert Tod. "And you say someone pushed you overboard. It is most remarkable—most remarkable. Have you no idea who that someone was?"

"Not the slightest. If I ever get back to New York again I propose to see the captain and look the matter up. The Honduras has gone on, of course?"

"Oh, yes. The captain would not wait, though I tried to persuade him all I knew."

This lie was swallowed as unsuspectingly as the rest.

"You must have had a hard time of it in the forest," said Harry, surveying Mr. Tod's dilapidated wardrobe curiously. "However, there's no doubt that Oliver and Joe will come up from the place below here—what did you say the name was?"

"Tecax."

"There's no doubt they'll be up in the morning and take us off. Probably you can get some new clothes in the town—I shall see that you are at no expense."

For the ensuing half hour they continued to converse in a similar strain, Pedro joining in the conversation as well.

They had strolled down to the river bank now, Tod pretending that he desired to see if his canoe had lodged among the trees.

"Hist! hist!" cried Pedro, suddenly, "do you not see that light?"

It was moving ahead of them close on a line with the bank.

"What can it be?" exclaimed Harry. "It is evidently coming up stream, and—Pedro! What ails you? Speak! what do you see?"

The question was superfluous.

What the Indian boy saw, all three saw now.

Pedro had turned, and was looking behind.

There, dashing toward them among the ruins, was a band of Indians, with the old priest Bartolo at their head.

"To the river! We must take the river!" cried the boy, and without the slightest hesitation he leaped into the stream.

"Mr. Tod! There seems no help for it!" breathed Harry. "Those are the Indians from whom I escaped. We must take to the river, or—"

"Take to it, then, and may the alligators make mincemeat of you!" screamed Tisbert Tod, with a sudden push sending Harry headlong into the water. "It is you that have brought me into this fix! At least I'll have the satisfaction of sending you to a worse fate than my own!"

Surely Tisbert Tod had forgotten the light, for he ran along the shore like a wild man, and plunged

into the forest just as the strong arms of Joe and Oliver drew Harry Hudson into the *alcalde's* canoe.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCHOOL-BOY EXPLORERS RESOLVE UPON A DESPERATE UNDERTAKING.

CRACK! Crack!

The double report of a shot-gun aroused the sleepy Padre (village priest) of Tecax, as he lay nodding at noonday in a hammock slung across one corner of his low thatched hut, with the turbid waters of the Usamasinta rushing by the open doors.

"It must be those Yankee school-boys!" muttered the Padre, starting up and rubbing his eyes. "Dear me, how they do startle one! They are never quiet—but here they come now."

Three young men, laughing and talking as they ran, burst in upon the sleepy Yucateco, banishing all chance of his being able to prolong his *siesta* to the winds.

All were dressed in short, white coats, broad-brimmed straw hats, white duck trousers, and high leather boots.

Two carried rifles slung across their shoulders, while the third—a young man bearing a remarkable resemblance to Harry Hudson, late of Dr. Tuckerman's school, carried a smoking shot-gun in one hand, the other holding a bird of beautiful plumage, red, green and yellow, the tail feathers being of such enormous length as to trail upon the ground.

We find matters greatly improved for our school-boy explorers.

With his rescue by Oliver Elmore and Joe, the troubles of Harry Hudson seemed to have come to an end at last.

On that memorable night at the ruins of Izamal, the boy Pedro had succeeded in reaching the *alcalde's* boat unharmed.

Then in plain view of the shouting Indians, headed by Bartolo, the old priest, the boat had been pushed out into the channel of the Usamasinta, and soon shot out of sight amid the overhanging trees.

Nothing was seen of Tisbert Tod.

Had he quietly stood his ground he also would have been taken into the *alcalde's* boat.

The treacherous attack on Harry Hudson and his subsequent retreat to the jungle had left him at the mercy of the Indians—the boys could not have helped him if they would.

Now all this happened a week previous to the date of which we write, and among the boys Harry Hudson's adventures had been discussed for all they were worth.

Since that time they have remained at Tecax, the trading-post of the mahogany cutters, and the only inhabited spot of which this wild region could boast.

Here they were able to put themselves in good shape for life in the country into which they had so unexpectedly dropped.

Jose Menendez's father was a well-known character all over Central America, and even in this out of the way corner of the country the Nicarguan found no difficulty in obtaining all the money for which he chose to ask.

The advance was made by the raft captain, Senor Perez.

He accepted Joe's draft on his father in return.

With the funds thus obtained the boys provided themselves with rifles, a shot-gun, clothing, and everything else needed.

Then came the question what to do.

Strangely enough Harry did not yet fully suspect Tisbert Tod of deep sinister motives.

The push into the river he was inclined to look upon as the sudden action of a half-crazy individual, for as a mild sort of lunatic all three of our friends had upon deliberation decided Mr. Tod to be.

"I have no doubt that it was he who pushed me off the steamer," said Harry, as they talked the matter over in the hut of their new acquaintance, Padre Yznaga, one evening after tea, "and I know that he pushed me into the river, yet, somehow, I can't bring myself to go away and abandon the crazy fellow to the dreadful fate from which I have escaped myself."

It was a noble sentiment, but one with which Joe and Oliver were not inclined to agree.

There seemed little doubt that Tod had been captured by the unconverted Indians from the mysterious city among the Sierras.

Three times our friends had returned to the ruins of Izamal with a large force and searched for the missing man, but without success.

The prolonged absence of Diego also had produced some excitement in Tecax; but no one seemed to suspect Tisbert Tod of being the traveling photographer who in former years had visited the place.

During their visit to the ruins the young explorers had succeeded in gathering quite a collection of archaeological objects for Professor Longmore's museum.

Among these were the following:

A collection of clay idols of various horrible shapes.

A collection of arrow and spear heads of obsidian—a sort of black stone which shines like glass.

A collection of painted jars and cooking utensils, found in one of the chambers of a ruined temple.

A large sculptured stone head of some unknown animal.

A marble idol representing an Indian head with the setting sun carved upon its forehead, intended as a representation of the god Quetzalcoatl.

And many other equally curious objects besides.

These were all securely packed, addressed to Professor Longmore at New York, and shipped down the river in charge of the Indian boy Pedro, on Senor Perez's mahogany raft.

The curious little metallic idols found by Harry he kept about him, as, on account of their small size, this was no trouble, and he feared their loss.

Thus matters stood on the day in question.

In the full enjoyment of the strange country in which they found themselves, and still hoping to effect the rescue of Tod, the young explorers had lingered at Tecax, uncertain as to what course to pursue.

"Look at this strange bird, father," exclaimed Harry, as he held up his prize for the padre's inspection. "I shot it out yonder in the thicket. Can you tell me its name?"

"It is the quetzal, my son," replied the priest, "the bird prized most by the unconverted Indians of this region. Only their kings dare to wear the tail-feathers. They are very rare. If you could take that to your mysterious city now, no doubt you might sell it for a fine price."

"Or exchange it for the man we've been to so much trouble to find," suggested Joe, standing his rifle in a corner. "Look here, boys, we've got to decide upon some course of action before long. We can't stay here always. What do you think about it, father? Is this man—I can't call him our friend—alive or dead?"

The padre shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe*, (who knows) young gentleman?" he replied. "Those unconverted Indians are bad fellows. No doubt they have eaten the Senor Tod by this time. As for their mysterious city, many believe it to be a myth. Senor Hudson and I know better. He has seen it, and years ago when I was a young

man I climbed to the top of the mountain over there and beheld its white buildings glittering in the sun."

"Look here, boys," cried Harry, "I don't want you to think that I am fool enough to risk my neck for a crazy idiot who has twice attempted my life, but I am dying to see more of this mysterious city. If you two say the word I am willing to make the attempt to reach it—we'll rescue Tod if we can."

"I'm with you," said Oliver. "It's worth some risk to accomplish what no man has ever succeeded in accomplishing before."

"I don't know how it can be managed," said the Nicaraguan, shaking his head doubtfully. "What do you think about it, father? Can the thing be done?"

During the discussion the priest had been looking at the dead quetzal meditatively.

"It can be done if one only has the courage," he now said, slowly. "As to rescuing Senor Tod, that is a matter of doubt; but if I were your age I think I could enter that city and leave it in safety if I were to try."

"How would you manage it?" demanded Harry, eagerly.

In answer, the padre rose, and taking an old leather-bound book from a closet, read as follows:

"There is an ancient tradition among the Maya Indians of Yucatan that their principal god, Quetzalcoatl, will one day appear to them in the form of a young man wearing the tail-feathers of the sacred bird, the quetzal, on his head, and with a face glaring like the setting sun."

The reading, as well as the entire conversation, was in Spanish, of course, Joe acting as interpreter for all.

"I must confess I don't understand yet," remarked Harry, as the padre closed the book.

"Perhaps not; but I will explain. Suppose you were to masquerade as Quetzalcoatl? It is my belief that you could then walk the streets of that city unharmed."

"Well?"

"You have the tail-feathers of the sacred bird, Senor Hudson."

"I see. But about the face? How are we going to fix that?"

"Suppose you were to enter at night? A little phosphorus rubbed on your face would do the business. Look here, young gentlemen, you have aroused my ambition. I am tired of this dull place, and am ready to join you. We can get a guide easily among the Indians in the village. Suppose we try it? Whether we succeed or fail, we can still cross the mountains and go down to the city of Guatemala on the other side—a place I have long been intending to visit. From there you easily get to Nicaragua, Senor Menendez's home."

"How soon can we start?"

"To-morrow if you like. We must keep the matter a profound secret. At least you will have the pleasure of exploring an unknown country, if nothing else."

Harry looked at his companions.

"Will you go, boys?" he asked.

"I shall go wherever you do, that's certain," replied Oliver, quickly.

As for the Nicaraguan, he had already seized the quetzal, and was beginning to pull the feathers out of his tail.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS CITY OF YUCATAN.

SUNSET in the Sierras!

On the top of a thickly-wooded hill stand the school-boy explorers, peering down into the valley beneath

with Father Yznaga, the priest of Tecax, and an Indian guide by their side.

It had taken longer to perfect their arrangements than our friends had anticipated.

Since the noonday meeting in the padre's hut two days had elapsed.

Now upon the evening of the second day the desire of our friends had been at last gratified.

They beheld before them a sight well worth two years of ordinary life to behold.

At their feet, surrounded by the unbroken forest, lay the far-famed mysterious city of Yucatan.

Reader, do not for an instant doubt the existence of this city.

It has been seen on several occasions, though until now no traveler had ventured to approach thus near.

It is there still, mysterious and unknown, hidden in the dense forest which covers this part of Central America, reaching from the coast to the mountains, miles upon miles in extent.

Padre Yznaga had been fortunate in his selection of a guide.

Jaime—or Jim, as the boys decided to call him—was an Indian who had been born in the city, a recent convert of the priests, and a man who knew the way through the forest as a scholar knows the pages of a favorite book.

He had agreed to guide them to it, but no more. It would have been death for him to enter or to allow his former comrades to even suspect what he had done.

He had also assured them that it would be an easy matter to reach the high-road between Mexico and Guatemala—which at a distance of not over thirty miles from the point where they now stood crosses the mountains—and had assured them that they could ride mule back all the way if they placed themselves entirely in his hands.

They had been traveling now since daybreak, and had halted at the summit of this hill in response to Jaime's command.

"There is the city, father," he said, in the Indian language. "Right through that clump of trees and you will see the place where I was born."

The padre was off his mule in an instant, passing the word to Joe.

It was a wonderful sight.

As they bent over the abrupt descent at their feet, the school-boy explorers beheld that which they were not likely to forget.

A vast collection of curious stone buildings similar in every respect to the ruins which they had already explored.

They lay almost at their feet upon a broad plain, their white sides and tops glittering in the setting sun.

"That's it! That's it!" whispered Father Yznaga, in awe-stricken tones. "I saw it when a young man, and can never forget it. Don't you see the people moving about there?—they look like ants—they say that they keep their dogs underground to prevent their bark from being heard, and——"

"It is true, padre," said the guide, upon being questioned. "The same with the cattle and fowls. We are here. When you have looked enough we will continue on our journey. Every moment we remain here is at the risk of our lives."

"What are we going to do?" whispered the priest. "Shall we rest satisfied with having seen the lost city of Yucatan? Jaime thinks that is all we came for. I engaged him only to show it to us, and then to guide us through the woods to the Guatemala road."

"It won't satisfy me," answered Harry Hudson. "I haven't come so far for nothing. We ought to

try and rescue Mr. Tod if we can. I bear the man no malice. I am ready for any risk, so that I can only say that I have been inside the mysterious city. One of us only can try your plan, father. Now, which one shall it be?"

"It won't be me, at all events," said the priest. "I'm too old and too fat to masquerade as the god Quetzalcoatl. If I were only as young as you, now——"

"But you ain't. Come, Oliver, Joe, what do you say?"

"I'm bound to see it through," said Oliver. "Let's draw lots for it. We'll all approach as near as we can in safety. The lucky one shall go forward, enter the city and see if anything can be seen of Tod—the rest must wait for his return."

It was a bold and hazardous undertaking, but our three young friends were of that sort who do not hesitate when danger lies ahead.

The lots were drawn.

The choice fell upon Harry Hudson.

Fate had written that he should attempt to enter the mysterious city of Yucatan.

"We will leave Jaime and the mules here," said the padre, "and descend as close as we dare. Midnight will be the best time to try it. I wish I was young, Senor Hudson, then it would be I, not you, who should go."

Father Yznaga having arranged with Jim, the guide, to await their return, the descent of the hill was now begun.

The distance was not great, and, fortunately, there were no outlying suburbs to the collection of buildings below them.

The city—it must be understood, of course, that in size it did not exceed a small town, as we in the United States understand the meaning of words—was surrounded by the forest on all sides.

Halting in the midst of a thick growth of sapota trees in such a position as to enable them to obtain a view of the nearest buildings, the venturesome explorers watched and waited for several hours.

They could have thrown a stone against the nearest building had they chosen.

Now that they were so near very few persons were to be seen.

The buildings nearest to them resembled those examined at Izamal, being for the most part upon the tops of high terraces approached by flights of steps, and arranged with no special reference to streets.

Scattered among them were rude huts of boughs and thatch, such as were to be seen all over the settled portion of Yucatan; and from these lights could be seen twinkling, with persons moving in and out, but no one seemed inclined to approach the place while the watchers lay hidden among the trees.

There were no horses or vehicles, no animals of any kind, nor signs of traffic and trade.

Everything which goes to make up the busy life of a city was wanting, yet on every hand rose those enormous white buildings, which showed plainly what the place had been in ages long passed.

"It is just as I always supposed," said Father Yznaga, at length, after a long and careful examination of the strange scene before him. "This city—if city it can be called—is half in ruins. A tribe of Indians have undoubtedly occupied it for centuries; but they are only the degraded descendants of those who built it. It is too dark to see much, gentlemen, but you can observe how few people there are, the mean character of their own dwellings compared with these magnificent structures. No doubt, if we could see the interior of those temples or palaces, or whatever you choose to call them, we would find them crum-

bling ruins only a shade better preserved than hundreds of others scattered about in the forests throughout Yucatan."

"I'll tell you all about it when I get back, father," replied Harry. "What time is it?"

"Half past eleven," said Joe, opening his watch and feeling of the hands. "Look here, Hudson, we are taking entirely too much risk on account of that wretched Tod. We have surely seen enough to satisfy us. I move we go back."

"And I second the motion," added Oliver. "I'll go in there among those fellows if you say the word, but I don't want you to. It is taking your life in your hands."

"It shall be just as you say, boys," remarked the padre. "Already we have had a nearer view of this strange place than any white man ever had before us. Since none of you have any special liking for this man Tod—they have probably sacrificed him to their gods long ago—suppose we go back, pass the night on the mountain, and at daybreak start for Guatemala and rest satisfied with what has been already done?"

For some moments Harry made no answer.

He stood peering from among the trees at the nearest temple, whose whitened sides seemed to rise almost to the height of the eminence upon which they stood.

The lights in the huts had all been extinguished now, and the mysterious city lay darkly before them.

Should he give it up—or should he venture on?

"Look here, fellows!" he exclaimed at last, "to back out is not my style. Father, do you think the time has come?"

"If it is to be done at all, my son, now is unquestionably the time."

"Then give me the quetzal feathers. Noll, you have got them. Is any change necessary in my dress?"

"What change can you make? You are dressed in white," said the padre. "If you are resolved, then stick the sacred feathers in your hat, and let me rub your face with this stick of moistened phosphorus. Take this Yankee revolver, and leave your gun behind."

It was done.

Ten minutes later Harry Hudson shook hands with his companions, and with firm step strode down the hill.

The sacred feathers of the god Quetzalcoatl floated down his back; they could see his face glowing like a living coal as he turned and waved his hand toward them.

Another instant and he had passed out of sight around the angle of the temple wall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUETZALCOATL.

It was when Harry Hudson first stepped beyond the line of the nearest temple, when his feet first trod the streets of the mysterious city, the last stronghold of the Maya Indians of Yucatan, that there entered into his soul sensations of fear.

He remembered then the words of Pedro, the Indian boy, spoken that terrible night on the mountain.

"Once inside the walls of the city, no power on earth can save you?"

Were the words prophetic?

Was he indeed hastening his doom?

Harry Hudson had set his heart upon rescuing his enemy if he could.

Not from any feeling of morbid sentimentality which prompted him to heap coal of fire upon the head of one who had wronged him, so much as a growing belief which during the last few days had begun to take possession of him, that Tisbert Tod was not as crazy as his strange actions might lead one to suspect; that after all he had some deep, underlying motive in all he had done.

This, it will be perceived, differed materially from the view he had first entertained.

The fact was, Harry Hudson had been thinking.

The letter with the black border and the London post-mark, which had been stolen from his table in Mrs. Honeywell's boarding-house, troubled him.

Had it contained bad news concerning his father?

Who had taken it, and why?

Was it Tod who had entered his room that night?

Had he really seen his cousin Dan Hudson run through the alley?

Was that individual at the bottom of all which had subsequently occurred?

These and a hundred similar questions had been tormenting the boy for days.

He had no fear of Tisbert Tod, and it is unnecessary to say that he had no love for him.

He wanted to save the fellow's life—first, on general principles, and second, in order that all this mystery might be explained.

Was it too late to accomplish this?

That remained to be seen.

Banishing the feeling of hesitation which now came over him, Harry walked on with slow, measured tread, keeping a sharp lookout on either side as he advanced.

A deathly stillness reigned.

As he gazed at the enormous buildings, with their wonderful carvings and sculptures, their towering flights of stone steps and hideous idols of life size cut in solid stone which guarded their doors, he saw that Padre Yznaga was right.

This was no living city.

Though not so far gone as the palaces and temples at Izamal, these buildings were also ruins, untenanted, desolate and falling to decay.

To be sure trees and grass had not been suffered to grow upon their roofs nor to spring from between the stones composing their walls, but they were ruins, nevertheless, the monuments of a departed race.

For the distance of several hundred yards the boy continued to walk the narrow way between the structures—so narrow that it hardly deserved the name of street.

Between the buildings many huts were interspersed of the same rude character as the rudest seen at Tecax, but their doors were all closed—not a soul was to be seen.

Where were the people they had seen from the heights above?

It seemed impossible that all could be slumbering, that no one should have been left on guard.

So far his attempt to personate the god Quetzalcoatl had been a useless waste of energy, since not the slightest obstacle had opposed itself to his advance.

Was it worth while to go any further?

He had entered the city, he had determined its character.

To attempt to penetrate any of the buildings and begin a search for the man Tod, would be foolhardy.

Better leave this ghost of a city while he could do so unmolested, and rest satisfied in the knowledge

that he was the only white man who had ever trod its streets.

Harry Hudson had reached this conclusion and was about to turn on his steps, when a sudden burst of wild, barbarous music proceeded from beyond a particularly magnificent structure just ahead of him threw him on the alert.

The music was accompanied by a multitude of voices bursting into sudden song.

Had he come upon the inhabitants of this mysterious place at last?

It certainly seemed so.

An overwhelming sense of curiosity impelled the boy to advance.

Creeping cautiously along close under the shadow of the building on his left, he found himself at the entrance to a great square, or plaza, filled with a pressing throng.

On all sides of this open space rose temples and palaces surpassing in grandeur anything yet beheld, while in the midst of the throng, standing upon a raised stone platform before a great stone idol of hideous countenance, was the old priest, Bartolo, seen by Harry in the ruined temple on the coast, with Tisbert Tod, pale and trembling, at his side.

The unfortunate man was clothed in his usual garments, and free so far as bonds were concerned.

His head was bare and wore a sort of chaplet of leaves. As he stood, it seemed to Harry that his lips moved as though in prayer.

Around the altar before the idol were a number of half-naked youths bearing flaming torches—the only light thrown upon the weird scene.

These enabled Harry to see the faces of the priest and his victim with startling distinctness, while the countenances of the surrounding Indians remained in the shade.

Were they about to sacrifice the wretched man?

Not yet, it seemed, for at that moment the Indian priest, taking Tisbert Tod by the hand, led him down from the raised platform, and a strange procession began.

It was headed by the torch bearers, followed by the priest and Tod.

Immediately behind them walked a band of musicians playing on strange, stringed instruments, resembling guitars.

Then came some hundreds of youths and maidens, lightly dressed, and decorated with beautiful flowers.

The mass of the populace brought up the rear.

"I must get out of this," thought the boy. "To stay longer is madness. No power can save that man now."

He turned and would have retreated stealthily in the direction in which he had come, when, from the building by the side of which he stood, there suddenly emerged a number of Indians, fantastically dressed, who began to descend the steps.

They caught a glimpse of Harry Hudson almost instantly.

"Quetzalcoatl! Quetzalcoatl!" burst from their lips, and without an instant's hesitation all flung themselves on their faces upon the steps.

It was at this moment that the head of the procession came abreast of the place where the now thoroughly frightened youth stood as though riveted to the ground.

They had heard the cry of the men on the steps of the temple, and all eyes were directed toward himself.

As he stood there in the shadow, the quetzal feathers streaming behind him, the boy's face glowed under the action of the phosphorous, stirring the

superstition of those who beheld it to the profoundest depths.

His handsome figure bore out the deception.

He looked a god indeed.

"Quetzalcoatl! Quetzalcoatl!" burst from a thousand lips.

The musicians ceased to play, the torch-bearers dashed their torches to the earth.

Many fell upon their faces, while the multitude fled terror-stricken through the square.

The sudden change in the situation recalled Harry Hudson to himself.

It was his opportunity, and he was not slow in embracing it.

His masquerading in the guise of the Maya god, Quetzalcoatl, had succeeded, as Padre Yznaga had prophesied would be the case.

Among those who fell on their faces before him was the priest Bartolo.

Instantly Harry leaped to the side of Tisbert Tod.

"Come!" he whispered, "save yourself! Not a moment is to be lost! We must run for all we are worth!"

CHAPTER XIX.

TISBERT TOD AT HIS TRICKS AGAIN.

"Do you see anything of the boat, Joe?"

"Not a thing, Harry, not a thing. It's confoundedly dark, and I've been straining my eyes for all they are worth, but I can't make her out at all."

"Gentlemen," interposed a thin, spare, smooth-tongued individual, easily recognizable by those who have followed this narrative as Mr. Tisbert Tod. "I think the boat will be here in ample time—in ample time. I see nothing to worry about, really nothing to worry about, but I may be wrong, I may be wrong."

"Tod would make a good man to work for a candidate on election day, because he'd be continually repeating," whispered Oliver Elmore, as side by side with his friends Harry Hudson and Jose Menendez he began pacing the wharf at San Jose de Guatemala, the principal port on the Pacific coast of the Central American State bearing the latter name.

"Your joke is a good one, Noll—a good deal better than the man," returned Harry, pausing to peer out upon the ocean once more in hopes that a glimpse of the expected boat might be obtained; "but for my part I hope we've seen the last of this Tisbert Tod for a long time to come. Whether he actually pushed me off the Honduras or not I suppose we shall never know; but this much I do know, he has upset all our plans, changed the whole nature of our vacation trip, and cost Joe here a pretty sum of money, which will never be returned to him in the world."

"Borrowed a hundred dollars of me before we left Guatemala this morning," interposed Joe.

"He did!" exclaimed Harry and Oliver in a breath.

"Yes, he begged so hard I had to let him have it. He says he's ruined by his accident; that he has a wife and ten children probably starving in New York, so I lent him money enough to buy a return ticket by the next Pacific Mail steamer which touches here to-morrow on the way to Panama."

"You two fellows are a plagued sight softer hearted than I am," muttered Oliver, with a contemptuous glance toward Tod, who, though out of hearing, stood watching the boys from his position at the end of the pier. "Here is Hudson risking his life among a parcel of savages to save a man who tried to drown him—and succeeds, too, I'll give him credit for that

—and you, Joe, have supplied the fellow with clothes and money, and are now going to send him home. In my opinion he is a rank fraud. I'd contribute something to send him to Halifax. What in the world brought him down here to-night, do you suppose? Why didn't he stay in Guatemala until his steamer was due?"

"Came to see us off, I imagine," replied Joe, laughing. "Anyway, we owe him lots of adventure and lots of specimens for our school museum. As for Hudson, he ought to feel under obligations to him. If it hadn't been for Tisbert Tod, he would never have been able to boast, as he can now, of being the only white man who has been in the mysterious city of Yucatan. But here is our boat at last, fellows. Now, then, we are off for Nicaragua and my old home. Won't the old gentleman be surprised, though, when he hears the story we have to tell?"

"He'll be more surprised when he sees all the drafts for money you've drawn come piling in on him," laughed Oliver, and the school-boy explorers hurried to join Tisbert Tod at the end of the pier.

It was just as Joe Menendez had said.

Harry Hudson now enjoyed the honor of being the only white person who had ever entered the mysterious Indian city of Yucatan.

On that memorable night, when at the risk of his own life, he had saved that of his enemy's, Harry had settled forever the question of the existence of a city still inhabited by the ancient Indian races of Yucatan.

His escape had been effected without much difficulty.

Before the superstitious Indians had recovered from their astonishment Harry had dragged Tisbert Tod behind the nearest building, and by another way made his escape from the city.

As every man, woman and child had assembled in the plaza to witness the sacrifice, they encountered no one.

The forest was gained in safety, and almost before the astonished Tod had opportunity to realize to whom he owed his preservation, they had encountered Padre Yznaga, Oliver and Joe, who had advanced as near to the outlying buildings as they dared.

They had seen the excitement from their point of observation, and had given Harry up for lost.

It was no time for explanations now, and none were attempted.

Without the slightest delay all had plunged into the forest, and making the best of their way up the mountain side, in due time gained the spot where they had left Jim the guide.

Here they paused only to take one last look down upon the mysterious city.

Far below them lights could be seen flashing everywhere, with crowds of Indians rushing to and fro about the streets.

"They are looking for Quetzalcoatl!" exclaimed Padre Yznaga, "but they will never find him. My son, you deserve that a medal should be struck in your honor. It was a brave action, and may have the effect of putting a stop to human sacrifice among these unconverted Indians. There is not a man among them who will not believe until his dying day that the god of the Mayas appeared to them in person and snatched their victim away."

Of course the explorers did not linger.

Night though it was, the mules were immediately saddled, and under the skillful guidance of Jim, they pushed on over the mountains, and by dawn had reached the Guatemala road.

When once he understood the situation, Tisbert Tod had been overwhelming in his thanks.

He apologized most abjectly for pushing Harry into the Usamasinta river, claiming that he had been so frightened at the sudden appearance of the Indians that he had lost all control of himself, and did not realize what he was about.

The apology was a lame one.

When Harry openly accused him of having thrown him overboard from the steamer he denied it. When he questioned him concerning Dan Hudson, he stoutly maintained that he had never heard of the man in his life.

Of course Harry could do nothing.

He had his suspicions, and that was all that it amounted to.

Tod had been captured by the Indians before he had run a hundred yards from the river bank, had been taken to the mysterious city, and would unquestionably have lost his life had it not been for our hero's courageous act.

Again and again he assured Harry Hudson of his gratitude, but all felt suspicious of the man and his motives, and during the remainder of the journey left him severely to himself.

Their way to the City of Guatemala lay through a wild, mountainous country, and occupied a full week.

On the journey the explorers visited the ruined cities of Quiche and Kachequel, gathering many interesting specimens for the museum at Dr. Tuckerman's school.

After a week spent in the city of Guatemala they engaged passage in a coasting vessel for Nicaragua, and now, upon the evening of which we write, had come by rail to the port of San Jose to embark, as we have seen.

They had taken leave of Padre Yznaga and Tisbert Tod that morning at the hotel, and were greatly surprised, therefore, to find the latter awaiting them on the pier.

Now, the port of San Jose de Guatemala, like nearly all the ports on the Pacific coast of Central America, has no harbor.

Steamers as well as sailing vessels are forced to lie five miles out from the shore, passengers being conveyed to them in small boats from the single pier of which the town can boast—the one on which our friends now stood.

It was for one of these boats that they had been waiting when they suddenly beheld Tisbert Tod walking leisurely toward them down the pier.

He had come down from Guatemala by an earlier train, he said, to make inquiries regarding the expected Panama steamer, and thought he would take the opportunity to see them off.

Now, as the boys hurried toward the end of the pier, they were again surprised to see Tod in earnest conversation with one of the crew of the boat.

He started slightly as they came suddenly upon him, but recovering on the instant, advanced toward Harry Hudson with extended hand.

"Your boat has arrived, gentlemen. We must part at last, it seems. Mr. Hudson, let me thank you again most heartily for your noble action in saving my life. Senor Menendez, you shall hear from me immediately upon my arrival at New York."

Harry took the proffered hand—he could not refuse it. Joe did likewise. It was only Oliver Elmore who turned away.

"This is your boat for the Nicaragua packet, gentlemen," said the man to whom Tod had been speaking, in excellent English. "Better get in as soon as possible. The surf is terrible, and she'll have the life battered out of her alongside the pier."

As he spoke the boat captain began passing down their effects to one of the crew below.

One by one the boys clambered down a steep ladder and seated themselves, the captain following.

A moment later and the boat shot away in the darkness, leaving Tisbert Tod standing alone on the pier.

For full ten minutes the man stood motionless, watching the rapidly disappearing light.

"Well, it is done!" he muttered, as he turned away at length. "It's done and can't be helped. I suppose I am a mean scoundrel, but I must have money. I can't again attempt the life of a man who has saved mine, and this is the only alternative. If I hadn't happened to run across my old acquaintance, Captain Simpson, in Guatemala yesterday, I should never have thought of it. The hundred dollars of that Nicaraguan did it, and the three hundred left of Dan Hudson's money, which is sewed up in my clothes, will get me back to New York to claim my reward."

The next day at noon Tisbert Tod embarked on the steamer Ancon, bound for New York via Panama.

What new piece of rascality had the man put into execution?

Let us follow the boat and see.

Certainly neither of the boys entertained the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong; yet had they waited on the pier fifteen minutes longer, they would have seen another boat arrive and the mate of the Nicaragua packet searching everywhere for the passengers he expected to meet.

Meanwhile the first boat pulled out to the roadstead and was made fast alongside a bark.

"Here you are, gents! This is the Nicaragua packet!" exclaimed the English speaking boat captain, as the ladder was let down by those on deck. "Tumble up now, tumble up! We must be off on this tide."

They were received on deck by the captain of the bark, who immediately conducted them to their bunks in the cabin below.

The boys had had a busy day of it and were thoroughly tired out.

A proposition from Joe to go on deck for a final smoke was vetoed by Harry and Oliver.

It was late, and they might as well retire at once.

They could do all the smoking they wished to-morrow. What they needed most just then was sleep.

To-morrow!

Who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth?

The school-boy explorers were destined to have ample time to inspect the deck of this vessel before they saw the last of her.

Before daylight next morning Harry Hudson was rudely aroused from his slumbers by the mate—it was the same man who had commanded the boat—shaking him by the shoulder as he lay in his bunk.

"Come, wake up there, young fellow," he said. "You've been snoozin' long enough. This is the captain's cabin and he wants to use it. Tumble up on deck and get to work."

Harry sat bolt upright in his bunk and rubbed his eyes.

Oliver Elmore, aroused by the disturbance, thrust his head out of his bunk into the cabin.

"What do you mean by work?" he demanded, angrily. "We've paid our passage to Nicaragua, haven't we? You must be crazy. I——"

"Crazy or not," replied the mate, sneeringly, "you fellows will find you've got to work your passage. This here bark ain't a-goin' to Nicaragua—not jest yet. She's the whaler Sunset, bound on a three years' cruise for the Antarctic grounds! Give me

any of your lip now and I'll make you sup sorrow with a big spoon before you see land again!"

CHAPTER XX.

A BUSINESS MEETING.

"GENTLEMEN," said Mr. Ringrose Hollywood. Q. C., solicitor for the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Co., as he arose to address the stockholders of that flourishing corporation on a certain morning some eighteen months subsequent to the last chapter of our tale, "gentlemen, I am happy to be able to announce to you that the affairs of our company, so long kept in confusion by the unsettled condition of the estate of the patentee of our electric process, the late Dr. Hudson, are about to be settled at last. The courts have decided to declare Harry Hudson, his son and only heir, to be dead, and to allow our worthy president, Mr. Daniel Hudson, to administer on his property and take possession of his stock."

The announcement, made at a special meeting of the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Co. in their elegant office, No. — High Holburn, London, England, was received with a general expression of satisfaction on all sides.

And no wonder.

Since the sudden death of Dr. Hudson, which occurred two weeks previous to the commencement day of Dr. Tuckerman's school, described in the opening chapter, the advancement of the now celebrated inventor's most successful patent had been seriously retarded on account of the uncertainty which hung over the fate of his only son.

The last patent of Dr. Hudson had proved of immense value.

The new system of electric lighting which it covered had been successfully introduced in London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and nearly every city in the United States.

It had turned millions into the treasury of the company organized by the inventor just previous to his sudden death from an explosion which occurred in his laboratory; it had been immensely profitable to his nephew, Dan Hudson, now president of the company, and if Harry Hudson's death could be proved his uncle's only heir.

Was Harry Hudson then dead?

It was so believed.

First it was reported that he fell from the steamer Honduras off the coast of Yucatan, and was drowned.

Then, just as Dan Hudson was about to receive from the Court of Chancery letters of administration—the dead inventor left no will—there came a rumor that the young man with his two comrades, who were also believed to have lost their lives, had been seen in the city of Guatemala.

This rumor was verified.

But right here came the mystery.

Harry Hudson, Oliver Elmore and Jose Menendez

had left Guatemala to go to Nicaragua—the latter's home.

From the time they had taken their seats in the train which was to convey them to the port of Guatemala until now all trace of the young explorers from Dr. Tuckerman's school had been lost.

What had become of them?

That was the mystery.

The wealthy Senor Menendez, of Leon, Nicaragua, had expended immense sums in the search for his son, but all in vain.

They had engaged passage in a sailing vessel for Nicaragua.

When the boat, which was to convey them to the vessel, touched the pier at San Jose, they were not found in waiting.

No tidings of them had since been had.

Now, after the lapse of many months, it had pleased the English courts to declare Harry Hudson dead, and to award the immensely valuable block of stock in the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Company to his cousin Dan.

The meeting progressed.

By all the stockholders present Dan Hudson's management of the affairs of the company was warmly commended, and it was proposed to elect him president again.

Dan Hudson, fat, oily and sleek, dressed in the height of fashion, and looking in every way the wealthy British manufacturer had just responded in a well turned speech, when the door of the private office was suddenly opened and a spare, sour-looking individual, with a pen thrust behind his ear, silently beckoned him out.

It was Mr. Tisbert Tod.

Better dressed, looking less starved, but the same old Tod who had followed our school-boy explorers through the forests of Yucatan.

His face was pale and his manner disturbed.

Seeing that the president of the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Co. did not seem to notice his gesture, he beckoned again, this time more emphatically than before.

"Excuse me a moment, gentlemen, but Mr. Tod, the secretary, desires to see me," said the president, rising.

He passed from the directors' room into the outer office and closed the door.

"What now?" he demanded, angrily. "Why do you disturb me when I'm busy at the meeting?"

Mr. Secretary Tod made no answer in words.

Instead, he seized Dan Hudson by the arm and pulled him toward a window overlooking the crowded street.

"Look there—look there!" he whispered, excitedly.

Dan Hudson looked.

There, upon the opposite side of the way, stood the missing heir to the estate of Dr. Hildreth Hudson, gazing intently upon the Anglo-American Co.'s gilded sign.

CHAPTER XXI.

THREE VOYAGERS FROM THE SOUTHERN SEAS.

IN a meanly-furnished room in a certain street of the city of London, located in that district of cheap lodging-houses, the Surrey side of the river Thames, there sat upon the particular morning which witnessed the meeting of the stockholders of the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Co. two young men, whose bronzed faces and easy manners bore witness to the fact that they had recently returned from a long sea voyage.

Both were without coats, and with a table between them were smoking long clay pipes.

One—the slighter built of the pair, whose black hair and yellowish skin showed him to be of Spanish-American extraction—was speaking of certain occurrences during their recent voyage, when quick footsteps were heard on the stairs without, the door suddenly opened, and a bearded youth of one-and twenty, with a face as highly bronzed as either of the speakers, burst into the room.

“Oliver! Joe! What do you think, fellows?” he exclaimed, speaking as speaks a man laboring under great excitement, “out of one of the worst of my misfortunes a piece of good luck has come. What do you think it is?”

“Can’t imagine, I’m sure,” replied the Spanish-American, taking his pipe from his lips. “To judge from your face, Harry Hudson, one would think you had struck a gold mine, that——”

“Come now, Joe, be serious. I’m in dead earnest, I tell you, fellows. You guess, Noll. See if you can tell what has occurred.”

Oliver Elmore—for the second of the smokers was as surely Dr. Tuckerman’s ex-pupil as his companions were Jose Menendez and Harry Hudson, the hero of this tale—puffed slowly at his pipe for a second or two in silence.

“I’m a poor hand at guessing, Harry,” he said at length, “but if I am to try I should begin with imagining that the lawyer you consulted about your father’s affairs yesterday had seen your cousin Dan and wrung from him the confession that he hired that wretched Tod to kill you, that——”

“No, no, Noll; you are miles astray. You know what I told you last night? Mr. Walters, the lawyer, has been looking into my matters. He says that my poor father left no will, and even though the courts have declared Dan Hudson heir to his estate, all the lawyers in England can’t keep me out of it once I make my existence known.”

“Then why in thunder don’t you do it?” replied Oliver, sententiously. “Here it is two full weeks since we arrived in London, and I happened by the merest accident to discover that scoundrelly fellow Tod in the window of the offices of that electric light concern in High Holborn, and nothing done yet. Confound the lawyers I say. They are too slow for me. If I had had my way I’d have taken Tisbert Tod out of his comfortable seat behind the secretary’s desk of

the Anglo-what-you-may-call-’em concern and kicked him from the Tower to London Bridge long before this.”

“Yes, and ruined my prospects by your haste, Noll. Let Mr. Walters alone. He knows best what course to pursue.”

“Maybe he does and maybe he doesn’t. Tisbert Tod must be made to sweat for that last trick he played us. Do you suppose I can ever forget how he hired the captain of the whaler *Sunset* to entice us on board his ship at San Jose?”

“Do you suppose I can forget the wreck of the *Sunset* away down in the Antarctic regions? Those dreadful weeks in the open boat when you and I, and Joe and five others, drifted about with frozen limbs and starving stomachs until we landed on that desert land which fortunately lay in our path?”

“I tell you no, Harry Hudson. Nor can I forget the weary months spent on that island until we were rescued at last by an English whaler and brought to Liverpool. You may preach forgiveness and Christian sentiment as much as you like, but I can never forget the debt I owe Tisbert Tod, and I intend to pay it, too! It’s only out of consideration for you that I have kept quiet so long as I have.”

“Don’t think that I have any sentiment to waste on Tod, Noll,” returned Harry, with a smile. “I know as well as I know anything that he twice attempted my life—possibly three times—but there are big interests involved in my poor father’s patent for me, old fellow. That’s why I move cautiously. When the blow strikes I intend it shall fall on Dan Hudson’s head as well as upon the head of his tool, Tisbert Tod.

“But enough of this! I have an appointment with Mr. Walters at eleven; he told me to be sure and keep it. We’ll all go together. From the way he spoke last night it seemed to me that he was about ready to make a move.”

“And while you fellows are discussing Tisbert Tod,” interposed Menendez, “Harry’s great secret remains unrevealed. What’s happened, Hudson? Tell it out! I’m dying to hear!”

“Why, you recollect those curious little idols which I found under that stone among the ruins of Izamal, which I’ve carried about me ever since as a reminder of our explorations in Yucatan?”

“Yes, perfectly. What of them?”

“What do you think?”

“You’ve sold them to get money to pay for our lodging. Just like you, Hudson—just like you. Why couldn’t you keep quiet? My letter must have almost reached my father by this time. We may expect a remittance by cable at any day.”

“We’ve used enough of your money, Joe,” replied our hero. “Yes, I have sold the little idols. Now give a guess what I got for them.”

“Oh, a couple of pounds, I suppose. They were only brass and of no special value. I’ve found hundreds of them on my father’s estate.”

“You guess, Oliver,” said Harry, mysteriously.

"Well, a hundred pounds, then," returned Oliver, "since you seem inclined to make such a mighty mystery of it. I don't doubt, though, it's ten times more than you actually got."

"Boys, I got a thousand pounds for them!" exclaimed Harry, triumphantly, at the same time displaying a large roll of Bank of England notes. "The eyes of each one of those idols were diamonds. They were so clogged up with some kind of rust that I never discovered it. I took them to a curiosity dealer in the Strand, who was honest enough to tell me what they were really worth."

"Eureka!" cried Oliver, springing to his feet; nor was Joe less excited. "No more shortness of money now! Luck's turned with us at last. Now, I wonder what the next thing will be?"

"Why, the next thing," said Harry, looking at his watch, "is to keep my appointment with Mr. Walters. Come, fellows, it's time for us to start. Unless my calculations are greatly astray, this will be the day to visit the Anglo-American and spring upon my dear cousin my little surprise."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAVELS OF THE SCHOOL-BOY EXPLORERS COME TO AN END AT LAST.

"HARRY HUDSON! Harry Hudson alive!" breathed the president of the Anglo-American Light and Heating Co., as he gazed from the window across the lighted street. "Tisbert Tod, you have lied to me! By Heaven, you shall pay dearly for it. I——"

"Stop! stop!" whispered Tod, fiercely. "This is no time for recriminations, Dan Hudson. I told you that I threw Harry Hudson from the deck of the Honduras——"

"Well, well, he managed to escape, didn't he? It would have been better for me if you had both been drowned, as for a long time I believed——"

"You waste too many words. I told you how I threw him into that Central American river; how he escaped and turned the tables on me by saving me from a dreadful fate. I told you how I bribed the captain of the whaler Sunset to take him to the Antarctic, where he promised to leave him. We both know the Sunset to have been lost. The sudden appearance of the boy now is as great a surprise to me as it is to you."

"Well, well, Tod, I am wrong, I admit it. But what are we going to do? If Harry is alive it is a desperate case for us—just as we had arranged to depreciate the stock of the Anglo-American and buy it all in at a low figure. Speak quick, man. Yours is the longer head. What are we going to do?"

"I intend to finish my job!" hissed Tisbert Tod, catching his hat from the peg. "You may see me back in an hour; you may not see me in a week, but

of this much rest certain—when I do come back you shall be able to furnish the Court of Chancery with ample proof of Harry Hudson's death."

"Look here!" breathed Hudson, peering from the window. "He's gone! I can't see him at all."

"No matter; I'll find him. I——"

At the same instant the door opened and several of the directors of the company stepped into the outer office.

"How much longer are you going to keep us waiting, Hudson?" asked Mr. Ringrose Hollywood. "Ain't it about time you came back and we went on with the election? Ah, Mr. Walters, how do you do?"

The outer door of the office of the Anglo-American had opened now, and three men entered.

The foremost one was one of the best-known solicitors in London, a man gray with years and honors.

Those who followed were younger men, with faces bronzed from long exposure at sea.

They were the school-boy explorers of Yucatan.

Strangely enough, they paid no attention either to Dan Hudson or Tisbert Tod, but stood quietly behind Mr. Walters, on the outside of the office rail.

Dan Hudson, with a sickly look upon his oily countenance, sank backward into the nearest chair.

Not so Tisbert Tod.

Darting a glance of hate toward the youth to whom he owed his life, he moved toward the door stiffly and opened it.

He was surprised that the lawyer did not seek to stay him.

He was less surprised when he discovered two policemen standing in the hall, one of whom, without the slightest ceremony, thrust him back into the office and closed the door.

"Mr. Walters, sir, what is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded the solicitor. "This is a private meeting, sir. Mr. President, why don't you say something. Who are these young men? What does it all mean?"

"One moment," replied the lawyer. "This is the annual election of the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Co., I believe?"

"It is, sir—it is."

"May I inquire who votes upon the large block of stock in that company belonging to the estate of the late Dr. Hudson?"

"You may, though I really fail to see how it can concern you. Our president, Mr. Daniel Hudson, here, will attend to that duty. He is Dr. Hudson's heir, and——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ringrose, but you are mistaken!" exclaimed Mr. Walters, in a loud voice. "Let no one leave this room. Mr. Elmore be good enough to ask the two officers in the hall to step inside."

"Gentlemen," he added, "this young man is Henry Hudson, son and sole heir to the estate of the late Dr. Hildreth Hudson, his father. As his attorney I shall vote on the Hudson stock in the Anglo-American."

Officers, yonder are your men. Arrest them. I charge Daniel Hudson and Tisbert Tod with conspiracy and attempted murder. Arrest them both."

"Thank God their plans have come to nothing, and Harry Hudson has lived to claim his own!"

* * * * *

All journeys must come to an end at last, if it is only in the grave.

The journeyings of our school-boy explorers fortunately had no such lugubrious ending.

Through the machinations of Dan Hudson and Tisbert Tod their explorations had covered a wider and vastly different field than the one laid down in the programme announced at the commencement day of Dr. Tuckerman's school, now sunk two years into the past.

Its end had come in a manner and after a lapse of time which no one could possibly have foreseen.

But as it brought great wealth to our hero, Harry Hudson, and Oliver Elmore and Jose Menendez were well content to rest satisfied with so happy a result, in spite of all they had undergone, no more need be said.

Dan Hudson and Tisbert Tod were placed under arrest then and there.

Mr. Walters had moved slowly, but he had laid his plans well.

Before the famous trial of these two scoundrels was finished—it followed in due course of time—he had woven a chain of evidence around them which the best legal talent in the United Kingdom failed to brush aside.

Nevertheless, it was a difficult case to prove, and might have remained unproven to this day had not Tisbert Tod shown himself to be quite as big a coward as he was a knave, and turning State evidence, with the hope of lightening his sentence, made a full confession of the whole affair.

Dr. Hudson had died suddenly, as has been mentioned. Notification of his death had been sent to his son—the black bordered letter—which had been stolen by Dan Hudson, who called on his cousin, and by an unlucky chance happened to see the letter lying on the table.

Probably it was at that moment he first conceived the plot; it is hard to tell.

How it worked—or rather, failed to work—has been sufficiently explained.

Ten years in Portland Prison for Hudson, five for the informer Tod.

Those were the sentences.

The two scoundrels are still there.

In England criminal sentences are carried out.

To-day Harry Hudson is president of the Anglo-American Electric Light and Heating Company, while Oliver Elmore, true to his threat, has ousted Tisbert Tod from his comfortable chair, and signs himself secretary of that flourishing concern in his stead.

Harry Hudson has never returned to America; there is nothing to call him back.

Oliver, on the contrary, has already made two trips to California. On the third—we heard the other day that he had already started—he intends taking a pretty Californian girl back to England with him as his wife.

Jose Menendez went back to Nicaragua, but having grown use to a different mode of life, found Central America anything but to his taste.

He is now agent for the Anglo-American in New York City, and is doing a flourishing business.

Recently he informed us that he had closed a contract for placing the light and heating apparatus in Dr. Tuckerman's new school building on Fifty-ninth street, opposite the park.

But Harry Hudson gained what afforded him more satisfaction than mere wealth can ever bring by his display of courage during his explorations in Yucatan.

He has recently published a pamphlet concerning his visit to the mysterious city of the Maya Indians.

This has brought him fame.

It has also brought him medals.

One from the Royal Geographical Society, others from similar bodies both in America and abroad.

Of course he prizes these, but he prizes the companionship of Oliver Elmore and the frequent letters from Jose Menendez still more.

What can exceed the pleasure of companionship with friends tried and true?

Harry Hudson can never forget the debt of friendship he owes his two brave companions.

Nor can he forget that they were his fellow SCHOOL-BOY EXPLORERS AMONG THE RUINS OF YUCATAN.



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